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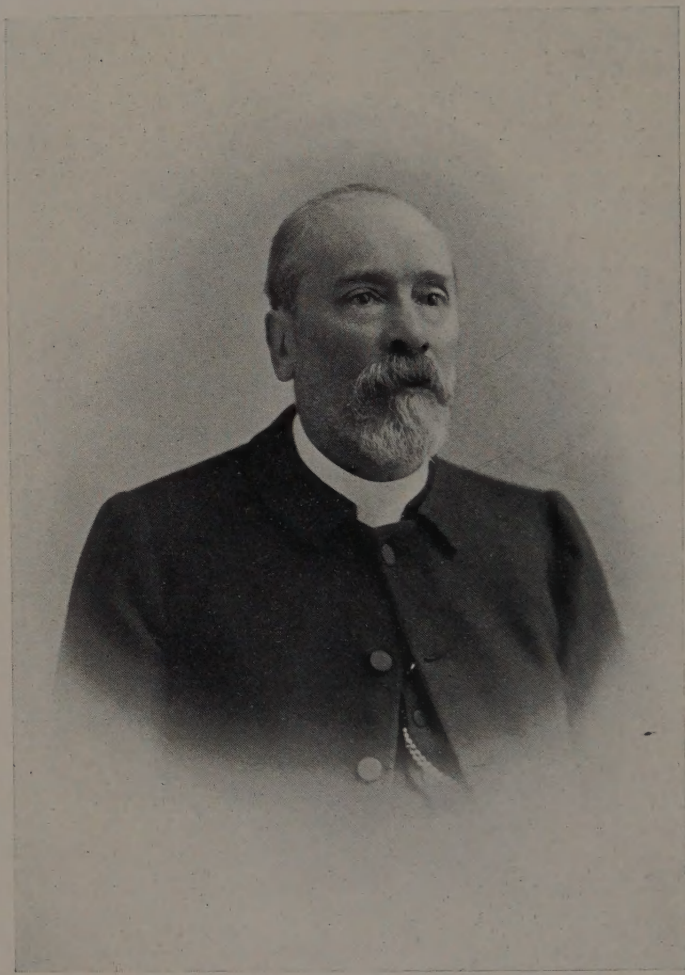
# MEMORIALS

OF THE LATE

# REV. P. W. MINTO

OF CANNES



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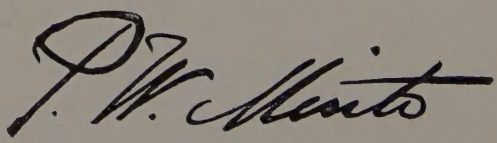

# MEMORIALS

OF THE LATE

# REV. P. W. MINTO

OF CANNES

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION BY

REV. W. L. WATKINSON, D.D., LL.D.

William Blackwood and Sons
Edinburgh and London
1914

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# INTRODUCTION.

THE author of the discourses contained in this volume, the Rev. Patrick Wood Minto, was born in Alloa in 1840, the son of a doctor practising in that town. A few years later the family removed to Edinburgh. Here the youth studied for and entered the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland. In 1867 he settled at Inverurie, continuing in that pastorate for seventeen years. Here he ministered with great acceptance to a gradually increasing congregation, and through the long period that has lapsed since he exercised his ministry in this town his old friends retained him in grateful, loving memory. The northern winters proving too severe for his delicate health, in 1885 he accepted the charge of the

Scottish Church at Cannes. This was an ideal arrangement. For nearly thirty years he occupied the pulpit of this church, and his ministry proved singularly effective. The place suited him, and he the place; rarely can an appointment be altogether so happy. His charge became one of the most influential Continental outposts of the United Free Church, and his fine influence was recognised by a very wide and influential circle.

The sermons which constitute this volume were taken almost at random from the MSS. left by the preacher, but they will sufficiently suggest his merits. His pulpit addresses were invariably scriptural. It will be seen that we are justified in declaring them "invariably" scriptural. They were expository in the best sense. "Among whom ye are seen as luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. ii. 15). We cannot think of a ministry in which this ideal was more exactly expressed. Saturate with scriptural truth, deeply familiar with its spirituality and power, Mr Minto himself was a luminary, and he was content just to hold forth the heavenly torch and trust all to its shining. Neither encumbered by technical

learning nor obscured by rhetorical expression, the treatment of his text made manifest its pure, essential truth. Nothing that may be called novel will be found in these pages. The words of the puritan Robinson, "There is yet more light to break forth from God's Word," are often quoted as an apology for original theology that has little sanction in the Scriptures. Whatever may be the source of the discoloured light, or whatever may be its value, we cannot accept it as a beam of the master light. This closeness to Scripture gave to Mr Minto's ministry its abiding freshness and force. The Hon. Ian Keith Falconer, the illustrious missionary to Arabia, testified that "for a continuance he would rather hear Mr Minto than any other preacher."

Another note not to be missed was the experimental character and intense spirituality of this ministry. Widely read and deeply interested in theological developments as the preacher was, his sermons were never intellectual or controversial exercises. Habitually, he at once addresses the understanding, conscience, and heart of his people. "By the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight

of God," was as strictly true of Mr Minto's ministry as of St. Paul's. In a letter of warm appreciation Lord Reay wrote, "Let me offer my sincere thanks for your awakening and searching sermons, which are a model of what sermons ought to be." And some years ago Dr Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh noted this feature of the ministry in question. "Had he been a robust man, there is no height to which he might not have risen as a preacher: and even as it is, he is ranked very high among the few preachers we possess of rare spiritual power and originality." The Rev. G. A. Johnston Ross, in a thanksgiving message, so precisely expresses the spiritual character of Mr Minto's ministry, that we must fain quote it. "It is quite impossible for me to leave Cannes without warmly thanking you for the strengthening and helpful spiritual food which you have ministered to us these last two Sabbaths. Doubtless you have heard from others more entitled and able than I am to express their grateful admiration of the wondering satisfaction and gladness caused by your sermon of last Sabbath morning. To-day, again, you have been for at least one hearer the means

of opening the eyes to behold wondrous things in God's book; and from my heart I thank you. May God bless your labour of mind and heart here, and reward you for the refreshment you give to those who love His word."[1] In every sermon, too, speaks the preacher's sympathetic heart.

The reader of these discourses will always be conscious of contact with a strong understanding, but not less of a persuasive tenderness. The preacher himself dwelt in a frail tabernacle, and his sympathies with suffering humanity were keen. The Orientals make music on a double flute formed out of eagle wing-bones. Mr Minto's ministry gave the sense of strength and sweetness. One who knew him well writes: "His memory will ever abide a joy and an inspiration for all who were privileged to know him, and especially for those of us who had the happiness of working by his side in the Master's service. We felt the touch of a pure, sincere soul aglow with a perfect love to Christ, and a deep sympathy with all striving and suffering hearts; while his humility served to throw into stronger contrast his

[1] We may note that these letters were preserved by a friend without Mr Minto's knowledge.

gifts as a preacher and teacher." The Rev. David Purvis, D.D., who occupied the pulpit of the Scotch Church, Cannes, on the Sabbath following the pastor's death, remarked: "Owing to his possessing in a rare degree the gift of meditation, he struck a deep note of spiritual experience in prayer. No one who ever heard Mr Minto conduct a service could forget the richness and beauty and simplicity of his prayers." And we may add that his addresses at the Communion Table were similarly expressive of profound spiritual thought and feeling, uttered in simple, winsome speech. The quiet power of those sacred occasions remains with many worshippers after many days.

Printed sermons usually lack much of that which gave power and charm to their delivery, and this is true of these published discourses in an exceptional degree. Mr Minto threw his whole soul into the delivery of his message, the written words took fire, many extemporised passages were added to them, and the discourse throughout was alive. The preacher was so exhausted by the effort that during the last year or two he was compelled to rest for the remainder

of the day. The present writer for several months enjoyed the privilege of listening to Mr Minto, and it is enough to say that the anticipation of the Sabbath service was a distinct pleasure all through the week. Happy indeed is the congregation whose days are lighted up with expectation of the instruction and inspiration of the sacred morn! For fourteen years, at the conclusion of the Cannes season, Mr Minto conducted similar services for two months at Aix-les-Bains, where too he was cheered by the success of his work, and where he made many lifelong friends, among them being the late Mr William Blackwood of Edinburgh, and other members of his family.

As a pastor Mr Minto was greatly esteemed. A majority of those who attended his ministry were more or less invalids who had sought the milder clime. His own delicate health enabled him to enter into their experience and moods, and to offer them the advices and solacements which are precious everywhere, but specially so in a foreign land. It is not too much to say that for this kindly delicate service he will be remembered gratefully by widely-scattered

multitudes. As a lady visitor wrote: "Mr Minto knows so well how to comfort those who are cast down that the sorrowful ones seem drawn to the Scotch Church quite naturally."

At the beginning of February he manifestly began to decline in health, and a few days later was altogether laid aside. His weakness was extreme and his sufferings intense, but he remained brave and patient throughout. When his mind wandered he was still in the sanctuary and occupied with holy things. The pure atmosphere in which he had lived and ministered for so many years was that in which he breathed his last. On Saturday midnight, March 7th, 1914, he entered in quiet triumph upon the eternal Sabbath. The Rev. Mr Somerville, of Mentone, conducted the funeral service, which was attended by members of all the churches, Protestant and Catholic, and amid sincere and general sorrow the lamented pastor was laid to rest in that loveliest cemetery of Cannes, the Gate Beautiful of the heavenly temple.

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# MEMORIALS

OF THE LATE

# REV. P. W. MINTO.

## THE UNTRODDEN PATH OF LIFE.

"For ye have not passed this way heretofore."—JOSH. iii. 4.

THE early history of the people of Israel has in all ages been used as a sort of parable of life. The Christian imagination has found in the events there recorded fitting emblems in which to express some of the deepest thoughts on the experience of those who are conscious of being divinely led through this present world. So by our hymns and devotional writings we are all familiar with the ideas suggested by the captivity of Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea, the march

through the Wilderness, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. These events have, in a sense, become parts of our own lives; they make vivid to us what we ourselves are undergoing.

In the chapter from which our text is taken, we have an account of what took place at the close of the Wilderness journeyings. The people were about to enter into the Promised Land. A new experience was before them. The days of their wandering had come to an end. They were to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land that so long had been held out to them as the object of all their weary marchings. It was to be done in a solemn and orderly manner. Means were enjoined for awakening reflection and leading to special exercises of faith. The Ark of the Covenant was to be carried at a certain distance in front of them, and they were to remember what that Ark betokened. They were to look at it, but not to touch it. Keeping their eyes fixed upon it, they were to go in procession, having their minds full of a solemn gladness at the thought that now at last the promises made to them and their fathers were being fulfilled.

I think, my brethren, we may find profit in letting the event speak to ourselves. At the beginning of the year we are specially reminded of what is always true, that we are going forward to an unknown future.

Let me then, in the first place, speak of life as *a path trodden only once:* "For ye have not passed this way heretofore." Sometimes one hears the wish expressed that life could be lived over again. We all know it is an impossible wish. A little reflection shows why it is impossible. It involves a contradiction. Supposing we could go back to the days of childhood with all the experience gained in grown-up years, we should not be children. If our bodies could resume their youthful form, we should find it impossible to live as children; we should have to say, as we say now — "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." We should just have to start, as we do now, from the point where we left off, and for the life that lay behind we should find ourselves responsible as we are now. Possibly we might be able to correct some of the slighter mistakes previously made, but our lives

would continue to be regulated by the same underlying principles. What we do issues out of what we are. Action is the result of character. Supposing, then, we were thrown back to the beginning of life with the characters we now possess, we may depend upon it that history for us would develop much in the same way as it has done. We should do just as we have done, because we should be just what we are.

It is this which gives such a meaning to the fact that we are in this world only once. Life in this respect is a drama. The main interest of the great dramatic works lies, not in the scenery nor in the circumstances of the story, but in the development of character. When you study a Julius Cæsar, a Hamlet, or a King Lear, you see how men shaped their destiny by what they were. Had these men lived their lives over again, they would have gone through the same course, for the principles of their lives would have remained the same. It is what we are that governs what we do. This, I repeat, is the dramatic element of our lives. We cannot help acting in accordance with our characters. No change in the mere scenery

of our lives will make us different people. No change of climate, no change of pursuit, no change of relationship will in itself alter our dispositions. However long we live, unless there be some fundamental change within, we shall be what we are now. We may not observe this in ourselves, but we often remark it in others. After a separation of ten, fifteen, or twenty years, you meet an old acquaintance, and your first remark is, "Oh, he is just the same as ever." His old generosity, his old candour, his old friendliness, appear as if no interval of years had come between the present and your former knowledge of him. Or it may be concerning another that you have sorrowfully to observe that there is an appearance of the same old selfishness, or old stinginess, or old censoriousness. No: what is true of such characteristics that show themselves on what may be called the surface of our lives is also true concerning the deeper principles. We may be sure that if to-day we are not what we ought to be, no number of years added to our lives would make us better. Yea, we may be sure that if we began our lives again with our present characters, we

should repeat the course we had already traversed.

Let us, then, take in the fact that we have to live in this world only once. It should awaken inquiry regarding the *meaning of life.* When you walk along a road where you have often been before, and where you expect to be often again, you may not give much heed to what is going on around you. But when you come to a new place and take new walks, your attention is aroused by every incident, and with eager eyes you look at the surrounding landscape. My brethren, this walk of life which we are all taking is not to be repeated. We cannot, therefore, afford to take it with listless, indifferent minds. When we were born we came into what is for us a new world, and we have just one opportunity of living in it. We are not coming back; we shall never see it again. It is our one chance; we shall have no other. Surely, then, it may be expected that we should reflect on the meaning of life, that we should consider its purpose, and come to some decision as to what is to be its issue.

Remember, too, that we have each to live an *individual life.* The higher any created

thing rises in the scale of being, its individual existence becomes more definite. The flowers you gathered a few days ago have withered; but you do not greatly mourn their loss, for you know that to-morrow you may gather others just as beautiful. You do not think of them one by one, for they can scarcely be said to possess an individual existence. A tree is an object in nature higher than a flower, and accordingly it gives us much more the impression of individuality. A tree has a prolonged history; it becomes an object of particular regard. When it is cut down its loss is felt. So it is of animals. The higher and nobler animals of whom we can make companions are thought of as individuals, whilst those that are lower are regarded only as specimens of their class. It is to us human beings that, in its full sense, this attribute of individuality belongs. There are millions and millions of human beings living on this earth to-day, yet each life has its own separate value and importance. Each appears only once. When one passes away, that life will never return. There will not be again in the world the same thoughts, feelings, experience. Amongst the millions to be born

after we have disappeared from earth, there are none who will live over again our lives; there are some, so to speak, who will take up the thread of our story and carry it to another conclusion. The world may go on, for aught we can tell, another thousand years; but never again will a human being appear who will think as we have thought, feel as we have felt, act as we have acted. No one will come who will present the same complexion of character; no one who will have the experience through which we have passed.

Such considerations may further impress us with *our need of guidance*. Those who come to these shores for the first time are careful to get all possible information. They write to friends who have been here before; they consult time-tables and guide-books, and are ready to take the best advice obtainable. We are all going through this journey of life for the first time. If there is any disposition of mind becoming to us, it is that of dependence. No fellow-man can be a perfect guide. The wisest person we know is like ourselves, about to cross the Jordan for the first time. He may have thought about it more than we, but he cannot

give us his hand and lead us across; he will have enough to do to get over himself. So, for the untrodden path of life, with death at the end of it, we need the guidance of One who not only knows about the way, but who Himself is the way; who not only knows about the truth, but who Himself is the truth; who not only knows about life, but who Himself is the life.

I wish, then, to speak for a little on this part of the subject—*divine guidance for that path of life which we tread only once.* I think we may get some suggestive hints from the directions given to the people of Israel. Without dwelling on mere fanciful resemblances, I believe that underlying the narrative there is a truth that may become as significant to us as the outward form of it was to the Israelites. It was said to them, "When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it." The eyes of the Israelites were directed to the Ark of the Covenant. It is what we see that must guide us. What was it that the people of Israel were to see? It was something different from what they had been accustomed

to see. Hitherto they had seen the cloudy pillar by day and the pillar of fire by night. That was an object in nature raised to what we call the supernatural. It told them that Jehovah was at the head of their hosts, and that they were to go wherever He pointed. It spoke of God as higher and greater than all that nature discloses, that He was One of whom it could be said, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." But now God had revealed Himself in another way. He had come into a personal relation with His people as their covenant God; He had given them His law placed within the ark, and on the lid of it, called the mercy-seat, had the blood of the slain victims been sprinkled that spoke the great truth, "For with Thee is forgiveness." This was something more significant than the cloudy pillar; it indicated a more substantial stage of religious training. Therefore it was to this that the eyes of the people were to be now directed as they marched in solemn procession.

It was the Ark of the Covenant in front of them that they were to see. As they gazed upon it, well might their gratitude be stirred and their faith be strengthened. The form

of the truth is changed for us; but the substance of it abides. If we are to be rightly guided along the path of life, we must look. The eyes of our souls must meet an Object in front of us. What do you see? What are you looking at? Have you got your eyes fixed on what gives you the assurance that through the unknown future you will be guided safely?

Ah! brethren, this is the great question for us all. We cannot guide one another. I suppose this truth was intended to be suggested by the direction that follows: "Yet there shall be a space between you and it about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go." Had the ark been placed a few feet in front of the line of march, it would have been seen only by those in the van. It was placed at the distance of nearly a mile that it might be conspicuous to the whole army. No doubt the procession could have been kept in the right track by those behind simply keeping in step with those in front; but the design seems to have been to awaken in each a sense of personal responsibility. Some were not to see with the eyes of others; they

were all to use their own eyes. It was an acted parable of a truth that is as important to-day as it was then.

If we are to be guided, it will not do merely to look at the others who are being guided. The lives of religious people around us, or the biographies of those who have passed away, may indeed be helpful to us, but we must each for ourselves look at the great Object of which the ark was a type. Therefore again I say, What do you see, and what are you looking at? To see God in Christ is the only security for living rightly our one life. It is enough. Much is before us that is mercifully hid from our eyes; but this great sight is disclosed to us—God, our covenant God; God, our redeeming God; God, our loving Father. He is revealed to us on the mercy-seat; in the cross of Christ He is made known. Each of us may say—

"I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!"

## SECRET PRAYER.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."—MATT. vi. 6.

TRUE prayer is in all circumstances the same. It is the lifting up of the soul to God in confession of sin, in thanksgiving for mercies received, and in supplication for blessings desired. It supposes the same great truths, that God is the hearer of prayer, that He has appointed prayer as a means of intercourse with Him, and that He has promised to answer prayer when offered in faith through the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, the one Mediator between God and man. It matters not whether we pray with others or whether we pray alone, if our souls are really going out to God with longing and believing expectation, we are engaged in that highest exercise of the human spirit; we are speaking to the invisible One, and we know that He listens.

What, then, is it that distinguishes what is called *private* or *secret prayer?* What is it that makes it to differ from family, social, or public prayer? And what, it may be further asked, is the advantage of it? What may we expect to gain from praying in the solitude of our chambers that we may not get from praying with others at the meeting for prayer or in the public assembly of the congregation? These are important questions, and it may be well to consider them in the light of our Lord's teaching.

Our Lord uses one remarkable expression, repeated several times in the Sermon on the Mount—"thy Father which seeth in secret." By this expression our Lord evidently wished to throw emphasis on a view of God that may be easily lost in social and public prayer. When we come together to present our common supplication, we are apt to think of God as One who takes notice of a company of worshippers, but whose attention can hardly be gained by the pleadings of an individual. Of course none of us would put this idea into words, and when thus stated we should reject it at once. We are often influenced, however, by what may be called half-formed ideas, vague notions that float

through our minds like vapours in the sky that hide from us the sun's brightness. We should never dream of comparing God to a Minister of State who would not consider it worth his while to listen to the arguments of an individual citizen, but who would gladly receive a representative deputation on some subject of public interest. Yet it may be the case that if we never pray except when we are praying with others, an unconscious comparison of that sort may influence us more than we imagine. We may thus almost unawares take into our minds impressions of God that are degrading; we may think of Him in a way that is unbecoming to His infinite graciousness.

Our Lord is here correcting such false impressions. He does it in a way that is fitted to touch our hearts, to show us that secret prayer has in it an element that at least is not so apparent in social or public prayer: "Thy Father which seeth in secret." A man outside his house may have to deal with large classes of people; he may have to listen to their views, and to expound to them his views; his intercourse with them may be frequent, and followed with important consequences, and yet he may know

little, if anything, of them individually. It is not so with the members of his family: he sees them in the privacy of family life; he speaks to them in a way he would never think of doing in public; he hears them speaking to him on subjects that could not be mentioned when addressing a general audience.

Now, so is it, our Lord seems to say, in secret prayer. When we pray in private, we pray to the same God as we do in public; but in private prayer there is more vividly present to our minds that view of God which recalls the blessed truth that He is our Father who seeth in secret. He sees each of His children individually. He knows them each by name; He is ready to listen to what each has to say. We all acknowledge that this must be so, because God is infinite, and an infinite Being cannot be limited so as to know people only in the mass; He must know them one by one. Yet what I would maintain is that without secret prayer we shall never realise the truth for ourselves. We may assent to it, but it is not a truth that we live by, or that brings to us personal strength or comfort.

It is this which distinguishes secret prayer. It is not that we engage in a different exercise of soul, or that we depend on different promises, or that we approach God in a different way; it is just this, that we practically enter into the meaning of our Lord's words: "Thy Father which seeth in secret." We speak to God as One who knows our individual history and our personal experience. We gain the conviction that when we pray alone we are not alone. There is Another in the room where no human being is with us. There is an eye that sees us, there is an ear which hears when withdrawn from human intercourse. You may say that is a truism which everybody believes; I say that you have never felt it as a mighty truth if you never pray except when surrounded with your fellow-men.

Now let me offer one or two remarks more especially on *some of the advantages of private prayer.*

In the first place, *it supplies a good test of our motives in prayer.* Our Lord on this occasion is throwing out a warning against the danger of falling into hypocrisy. It was a common sin in His day. There was a class of people whose interest it

was to maintain a reputation for piety. They were more anxious to appear good than really to be so. Their religion had in it largely the element of ostentation. They were not only assiduous in their attention to the public ordinances of the temple and the synagogue, but they wanted it to be known that they engaged much in private devotion. So wherever they were they made a point of being seen at their prayers. On the highway or at the corners of the streets they threw themselves into the devotional attitude; and if their voices could not be heard, they took care that their lips were seen to move.

As our Lord here points out, this was not private prayer at all. Private means "secret," and a secret that is known to all is no secret. Secret prayer must be prayer that goes on when no one knows that you are praying. It may be appropriate that at a meeting or in the sanctuary we should each engage in what is called silent prayer, but silent prayer is not secret prayer. You do not pray in secret when other people can observe that you are praying. You can only pray in secret when no one knows that you are praying.

Why, it may be asked, did our Lord lay such stress on having times when we should pray without its being known? It was to teach us that in prayer, as in everything else, motive is of supreme importance. He saw that many around Him would never pray unless they could get credit for it from their fellow-men. Their motive, if not wholly, at least to a large extent, was to have the name of being religious. It was to draw attention to themselves as people of piety. So He said to them, If you want really to pray you must make a secret of it. You must go to your room and shut your door; and when no one is aware of what you are doing, you must speak to Him who seeth in secret. Private prayer must be secret prayer.

For this it may not be always necessary to retire into solitude. We may secretly pray even when we are in public. When walking along the road, or when in a railway carriage, our hearts may be lifted up to God whilst no one can observe it. The moment we let it be seen that we are praying, our prayer is no longer secret. It may be silent, but it is no more a secret between us and God, and in divulging the secret we

have endangered the purity of our motives; and if we continue to pray, it will be rather to let others see how devout we are than to hold communion with the Invisible One.

Observe, in the second place, that secret prayer is *the best means of enabling us to realise our personal need.* The philosopher Seneca, in one of his letters to a friend, makes some curious remarks on this subject of which we are speaking. He tells us that some people when they went to the temple were in the habit of concealing as much as possible the requests that they offered to the gods. The reason was that they were asking things so disgraceful that they would have been ashamed for their fellow-worshippers to know the nature of their petitions. He concludes by giving his friend the maxim always so to pray as if men heard what was said. It shows how wide is the difference between heathen and Christian ideas. Certainly no one would for a moment imagine that when our Lord counsels us to have seasons of private devotion, He alludes to the possibility of our asking from God what could not be spoken of without shame to man. It is, however, true that much may be expressed in private

prayer that cannot find appropriate utterance in the services of the sanctuary. Necessarily the petitions in public worship must be general. They must express what is common to all the worshippers. Confessions of sin and requests for blessing must be put in a form adapted to what belongs to all of us as sinful creatures. No doubt the individual worshipper may apply much that is said to his peculiar circumstances, and may thereby be greatly helped in his personal life. If, however, he has any real knowledge of himself, he will feel how inadequately his own wants can be expressed by another. He has sins to confess that no one knows but himself; he has desires that cannot be uttered except in words of his own choosing; there are complications in his daily life which only he himself can understand. Were he to confine his devotions to public or social prayer, a large part of his experience would remain outside the sphere of communion with God. The instincts of the Christian tell him that he must confer with God about his whole life; he must take to God everything that interests him; he must lay bare his most hidden thoughts. To meet this

need of the Christian heart God has appointed the ordinance of private prayer. It is a most blessed privilege. It supplies what no amount of attendance at meetings or at sanctuary services can ever give. To live without it is to miss what is highest and best in the Christian life.

For note, in the third place, that private prayer *affords the best opportunity for intercourse with God as our Father.* The thought of God's fatherly relation to His people should never indeed be excluded from the supplications which Christian believers offer in common at the throne of grace. We are expressly reminded of it by the words with which the model prayer, commonly called our Lord's Prayer, opens, "Our Father which art in heaven." We are to recognise that God is the Father of all who in faith approach Him. We are to unite with others as our brethren in Christ. Yet it remains true that this which may be termed an open secret is most fully disclosed to the soul when engaged in secret prayer. "Pray to thy Father which is in secret." The secret of God being our Father is revealed to us when we are alone with Him. We may have acknowledged

the truth in public, and thought we knew its meaning; but when we retire into solitude, and are face to face with the Great Unseen Being, we feel the need of realising the closer relationship. It is indeed something we can hardly think of as possible to carry on the habit of near intercourse with God without the knowledge of Him as our Father. We might go to Him now and again with the confession of our sins, and in the greater emergencies of life feel the need of His aid; but to speak to Him every day, addressing Him only as our Creator and Judge, would cause us to feel that He is so far from us that we should find excuses for breaking off the habit. It may be safely said that no man will continue to pray in secret if he has nothing of the filial spirit. He may do it at times as a duty, or be driven to it by the stress of circumstances; but it will not be to him a delightful exercise of the heart. It is not enough to say, "*Our* Father which art in heaven." We have each of us individually to know what Jesus meant when He used the words, "*Thy* Father which is in secret." We may think of heaven as far off, but we cannot so think of what is de-

noted by the words "in secret." Where is your secret place of prayer? *There* God is. He is there observing you, looking into your thoughts before you utter any words. It is terrifying, you say. Yes, it *is* terrifying—so terrifying that you will not often resort to the secret place unless you get such a knowledge of God through the Spirit teaching that you will cry, "Abba, Father." Ah! if through Jesus Christ by the one Spirit you have access to Him as your Father, you will be ready to go to Him again and again. Yea, life will become insupportable to you without such a daily going to Him. It is this that will lend a secret charm to all your outer existence. It is this that will lighten for you life's burdens, and remove the monotony of its daily round of duties.

"*Thy Father which is in secret.*" You may say, My Father has the secret of my life. My fellow-men see my actions and hear my words, but it is my Father who shares my secret thoughts, my secret desires, my secret resolves. I can tell Him what I cannot tell to any mortal man. Oh how blessed to go into my room and shut my

door and speak to my Father which is in secret!

"Thy Father which seeth in secret *shall recompense thee.*" Secret prayer carries with it its own reward. The time spent in it is not lost time. The withdrawment from the world which it involves will bring no damage. No; it will bring gain—gain for all the work we are called upon to do. Never shall we have cause to regret the moments spent in secret with our Father. At the end of life the chief regret will be that these moments have been so few. What we have now most to complain of is our oft disinclination to take advantage of such moments. Alas that we so often let any trifle interfere with what might be the best moments of our fleeting existence on earth! The Lord teach us the value of time, that when opportunity is given we may be ready to go into our chamber and pray to our Father which is in secret.

# THE PROFIT OF LIFE.

"I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit."—
Isa. xlviii. 17.

The whole business of the world is constructed on the idea of profit. In every transaction between man and man there is the underlying thought of what is to be gained by it. Men buy and sell; they send the produce of the earth and the things they have manufactured to far-off places, and receive in return other goods, with the object in view of being profited by the exchange. The idea may be extended to life in its varied activities. Society is knit together by the interchange of mutual benefit. We give, and we take; we expend, and we receive; we scatter, and we gather. At an early age of the world's history men carried this thought into their religious life. It was the dominating idea of heathenism. Gifts were brought to the

altars of the gods, and it was expected that the gods in return would afford protection. What was received was regarded as the just exchange for what was given. It was a kind of religious merchandise. Men felt that they were entitled to victory in war, or to deliverance from pestilence, because they had yielded to the objects of their worship a certain amount of homage.

The prophets of Israel were guided to address their hearers in a language they could understand. So, when in the passage before us Isaiah referred to "profit" as a promised blessing, those to whom he spoke might readily turn their minds to the contrast between heathen error and revealed truth. If they took in the whole prophetic message, they would see that God did not mean to make a bargain with them—that, if He spoke of "profit," what He meant was that it was His to give, and theirs only to receive; that what they gave to Him was merely an acknowledgment of what He had already given to them.

The message has a meaning for us also. Our English term "profit" is derived from a word which means "to make progress," "to advance." When we profit by anything,

we are regarded as having in some way made progress or advanced. The thought of the word in the original is a little different; it is to ascend, or rise above. Hence it came to be applied to the idea of excelling. A man who profited by anything was regarded as excelling in the sense of getting out of it its higher element. He was in some way raised to a loftier height.

It is a fruitful thought, and may be turned to many helpful applications. When, for example, we speak of a *profitable book or discourse*, we may consider whether by means of it we have been mentally or spiritually raised. Has our mental vision been enlarged? Have we gained a higher view of things in the spiritual world? What has it done for us in the way of enabling us to see how many things there are in life of lower or secondary importance? It is the test that we ought to apply to all our religious services. What are they doing to give us a grander outlook? Are we being raised to greater heights of spiritual devotion? Are we getting loftier views of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, and of our own souls as originally made in the

image of God and as capable of immortal blessings? So, especially when we read the Bible, it must be our aim that our reading may be profitable. It will be so if it is our constant desire to look at things from that higher point of view which the Bible takes. It is what distinguishes the Bible from all other books. It is like a half-transparent veil through which we get glimpses of what is going on in a region higher than that of earth. Its purpose is to make the spiritual world real to us, whilst so far concealing it that we have to walk by faith, not by sight. So far as we enter into the spirit of the Bible, and take into our hearts its great revelations, we are taught to choose the things that are excellent and to set our affections on those things that are above. We ascend, we look upwards, and we learn to take a juster estimate of what is below us.

In like manner we are taught to deal with *life's opportunities*. In every position there is what may be called the lower and the higher element. The lower element is that which affords us sustenance, and enables us to live on from day to day with a fair measure of comfort. If we are content with

this, seeking nothing beyond it, we cannot be said to get the profit out of life that it was meant to yield. Life is a scene of opportunities for rising to higher levels.

In some passages where the word occurs, it is used in the active sense of being profitable rather than in the passive sense of obtaining profit. Certainly it may be said that some of life's best opportunities are those in which it is our aim to do good to others rather than merely receive good for ourselves. If we are truly to rise, we must look not every one on his own things but also on the things of others. Nothing so lifts us above selfishness as the sincere endeavour to use any talents bestowed upon us for the welfare of those around us. If we are only intent on getting profit, and never seek to be profitable, we shall fail to obtain what we think we are making so sure of. God teaches us to profit by showing us how we may give out as well as take in. Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world"; "Ye are the salt of the earth." It is the property of light to diffuse itself; it is the property of salt to mingle with other elements and preserve them from corruption. Light can-

not be kept to itself; wherever it is it sends forth rays to dispel the surrounding darkness. It may be a feeble light, yet it does something to make the place where it shines less dark. Your opportunities may be small, but nevertheless you are responsible for using them well. Seek to do even a little good, and you need not fear that you will lose; rather you may be certain that you will gain. As a general rule, they obtain most profit in their own lives who are most profitable to the lives of others.

*Life's opportunities are varied.* There is, for example, the opportunity of enjoyment. God has endowed us with the faculty of getting pleasure out of our surroundings. We are placed in a world where there is much to admire. Nature is filled with objects that appeal to our sense of beauty. Wherever we go we find something to look upon with interest. Then there is the enjoyment that comes from intercourse with our fellow-men. People like to be together; they like to communicate their thoughts and to hear the news of the day. Deeper sources of satisfaction spring from the close ties of kindred and of friendship. There

are the joys of affection that throw over life an indescribable charm. Every relationship has its own peculiar delight; every response of love imparts a thrill of pleasure.

Perhaps to some it may appear as if we introduced into life a specie of merchandise when we ask how these and other enjoyments may be turned to profitable account. It might be so if enjoyment were the end of life, if we were creatures that had nothing else to live for than to enjoy ourselves. The fact, however, that we are capable of reflecting on our joys shows that in a sense we are above them, and so we are called upon to use them for ends higher than themselves. They serve their purpose of ministering to our own and others' welfare. When pursued for their own sake, we abandon the lofty position in which we have been placed as being destined for something better than mere pleasurable emotion.

We have therefore, in all life's enjoyments, to distinguish between the lower and the higher element. The lower element is the feeling of gladness which we experience in the midst of the things which please us; the higher element is the reflex influence of that

gladness in our character. We cannot go through our joys and remain insensible to their moral effects. We are never happy without being either the better or the worse for our happiness. We are the better when it awakens our gratitude towards God, and when it promotes loving sympathy with our fellow-men. We are the worse when we have nothing else in view than our own pleased feelings, causing us to be indifferent to what others suffer, if only we are gratified by the things around us.

Now, when God teaches us to profit, He teaches us to rise with the higher element of life's enjoyments. He teaches us that all true joy is a means of bringing us closer to Him and closer to our fellow-men. We see that joy comes from Him who is called the blessed God, and we cherish a hearty goodwill for the happiness of those around us.

Life, however, is far from being a scene of continual enjoyment. It has been often debated whether there is more joy or sorrow in the world. It is not needful to try to settle the question. I think we may say that there is enough of joy to awaken our gratitude and to show us to what our nature,

when rightly guided, is capable of attaining; and enough of sorrow to teach us that, after all, the things of earth are insufficient for our perfect happiness.

What, then, are we to say about the losses of life? Can these be turned into opportunities of profit? Can we gain when to all appearance we are losing? We must allow that there are some losses for which in this world there is no adequate compensation. When a man has lost his health to such an extent that there is no hope of his ever being able for the ordinary duties and recreations of life, you will not easily get him to believe that he has thereby been a gainer. Or when a family from circumstances of comfort are reduced to the struggles of pinching poverty, you would seem to mock them if you told them that they may be better off than they were before. Need I speak of losses that we even more keenly felt than prolonged illness or straightened means—the loss of dear ones whose absence makes the world a desert? You will not readily persuade the lonely heart that life is better for the removal of the loved one who has gone into the invisible region whence no tidings can come.

In such cases as these the word "profit" seems out of place. Yet the records of Christian experience afford evidence of the fact that God is able not only to give a spirit of resignation to His will in the midst of such losses, but to teach those subjected to them that not otherwise could they have become possessors of eternal gain.

It is not, indeed, for us to insist upon this when speaking to our afflicted friends. Our words will have little weight, and what we say will seem unreal, or at the best the utterance of pious platitudes. It is here where we must throw emphasis on the language of the text—"I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit." The profoundest truths of life cannot be learned through human teaching. It is only God who can teach us to profit by life's losses. It is a secret that cannot be expressed by any words of man. It is for the most part useless to tell the sorrowing that their sorrows are for their good. They will find that out for themselves when God shows it to them. The best help we can give is through sympathy and prayer.

For ourselves, amidst the losses great or small which none of us as we go through life

can avoid, the thing we have to seek is an eye that can see in all things the higher element. The lower element in life's losses is the blank they cause; the higher is the hidden blessing that may lie behind them. We all remember the first lines of "In Memoriam":—

> "I hold it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

Ah, when our losses become as stepping-stones of our dead selves we may rise to higher things. When these losses came we were paralysed, we were as those dead, and we thought that life for us had come to an end. Ah, it is well if God has taught us from our dead selves to rise to higher things. It is a lesson too deep for any man to teach us; but what is impossible with man is possible with God. He can enable us to perceive something of the meaning of life's mysteries. And even when that meaning is wholly hid from us we may repose by faith on His own assurance, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter."

Finally, let me remind you of other losses that do not so readily obtrude themselves on

observation. There is the loss of a sensitive conscience that is quick to see what is wrong in word or action; there is the loss of that purity that instinctively shrinks from contact with evil; there is the loss of desire for the presence of God; there is the loss of the habits of private prayer; there is the loss of interest in the progress of Christ's cause; there is the loss of sympathy with the sufferings and the toils of the great masses of mankind. These are serious losses, because they tend so directly to put out of view what has been referred to as the higher element of life's opportunities. They may come upon us slowly and almost unawares. We may hardly be conscious of them, yet they may be telling disastrously on our character.

It becomes us to consider how far such losses have overtaken us in the past months. Indeed, it is a question that should never be long absent from our calculations—Are we gaining or are we losing as life goes on? What have we got to carry with us into its closing years? Are we profiting by our joys and by our sorrows, by our health and by our sickness, by our times of work and by our times of leisure, by the books we read, by the thoughts we have in our minds, and

by the conversations we hold with our friends? Have we an eye for the higher element in all these things? Do they raise us or do they lower us?

Oh let us listen to Him who says, "I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit." He claims us as His people; let us claim Him as Jehovah our God — our God revealed to us in a way clearer than to Israel of old, for in Jesus Christ He is our God and Father; and we may be sure that if earthly parents wish to see their children get on in life and rise to higher positions, He, our Father in heaven, desires that we should ascend to heights of spiritual attainment that shall bring us into closer fellowship with Him, and that shall make us more kind, more generous, more loving towards our fellow-men.

# THE CHRISTIAN'S AIM.

"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him."—2 Cor. v. 9.

In the Revised Version these words are thus rendered—"Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him." The apostle is not here speaking of what is needed for acceptance before God in the sense of being forgiven or justified; he is simply expressing his persuasion of the advantage of having one grand object to pursue, whether the sphere of pursuit be this life or the life to come. The words of the text, then, bring before us the subject of the Christian's aim in the twofold sphere of the present and the future. I wish, however, to speak chiefly on *the Christian's aim in the sphere of the present life.*

The true value of any life does not consist in the amount of work accomplished, but in

the *principle by which it is regulated.* A life that is outwardly full of effort may in the sight of God be of less esteem than one passed, so far as man can see, in useless inactivity. A man may be possessed of talents, of influence, of varied gifts, and in the use of these he may do much for the good of his fellow-creatures, and yet at the last, according to the divine standard, he may miss life's highest aim. Another may spend his days apparently doing nothing, poor, sickly, with no means to benefit his fellows, and yet so live in the sight of God as to gain the great end for which life was given.

In illustration of this, suppose the case of a man of widespread popularity; his name is in every one's mouth; his splendid acquirements are the admiration of a whole people; he toils night and day, sparing no effort to bring to a successful issue his different undertakings; he secures not merely fame, but the well-earned gratitude of thousands who have benefited by his schemes of usefulness. His, you would say, must be a true and noble life. In such a judgment, however, you might be mistaken. Suppose that his aim has been only to please himself,

that it has been his constant endeavour to gain that reputation on which his heart was set as the one end of existence, that for this he has spent laborious days and often sleepless nights, that self has been always the uppermost thought in his mind—is it not evident that, grand as may be his achievements, he is, after all, a man of little soul, because his aim in life has been unworthy?

Take, again, the case of a man who through infirmity is unable to win his daily bread. He is laid on a sick-bed, or sits helpless at his hearth; he is dependent on others for the supply of his wants; his days pass in a monotonous routine. "What a useless life!" you may exclaim. Ah, you judge without sufficient knowledge. Go to that man, visit him frequently, and you never hear a murmur escape his lips. The peace of God dwells in his heart, and it is his one desire that God may be glorified even through his sufferings. His, be assured, is far from being a useless life. He is giving an example of how the meanest life may be made noble when at the centre the aim is to please God.

Now, concerning this aim of the Christian, note what a *definite view it gives of the mean-*

*ing of life.* Many live without knowing for what they are living. They have never paused to face the question, Why am I here? There is no real unity in their actions, directing their life to one main point. It is not so with the Christian. He has before his mind something definite for which to live. He knows why he is here; he understands the meaning of human existence. He is delivered from that restlessness of spirit which leads some to be perpetually asking, What is the use of life? There is about him a repose that a selfish ambition can never impart. In hours of despondency, it is true, he may be oppressed with the feeling of his uselessness, Such sadness, however, does not arise from a loss to know what is the real object of life. Rather it results from the painful conviction that that object is so poorly attained.

The object is always the same. Never, therefore, does a Christian need to ask, Why am I in this world? What is it that makes life worth the having? Yes, the object is always the same. That Object is God. Let a man learn to live to please God, and he will live for one single definite purpose. Other objects change. The

youth, for example, lives for pleasure. When he grows to maturer years he may live for money, and when he advances farther towards the period of old age he may live for power. But here is an Object that never changes. To please God may give a spiritual zest to all the joys of life's opening years; it may consecrate the toils of middle age; and when the work of life is drawing to a close, it may impart to the soul a mellowing influence amidst the decay of bodily powers.

How *elevating is its influence on the character!* It is held by some that the essence of sin is selfishness. Sinful desires, sinful habits, sinful courses of action, if you examine them carefully, may be reduced to seeking in various ways the gratification of self. To please self, to advance self, to surround self with an atmosphere of glory —there you see sin in its essence.

If this be so—and certainly there is much to be said in support of such a view—we may understand that a life which is free from the stains of outward pollution may yet be very sinful. Yea, it is possible for a man to suppose that he is eminently holy whilst in the sight of God he is steeped in

sin. If he congratulates himself on his piety, if he thinks with complacency on the fervour of his devotions, if he is delighted with the reputation he is gaining for his edifying prayers, for his deeds of charity, or for the trouble he takes in trying to promote the cause of religion, then what is all this but living for self under the delusion that he is living for God? So far from being an advanced Christian, he has not yet learned the first element of genuine Christianity—the renunciation of self.

This, if I may so speak, is the very cross of the Cross. Now that the days of persecution have passed away, what is the cross that we have to take up in becoming the followers of Jesus Christ? It is the inner, the unseen cross. This is the reason why so many refuse to take it up; it is the unseen cross. It involves martyrdom without anything of the glory that martyrdom may sometimes bring. A visible cross may be painful, but to the man who, under the religious garb, seeks the honour of self it may be welcome. It gives him the opportunity of winning a reputation for steadfastness of purpose or for consuming zeal in the cause of Christ. But to take up

a cross which no one sees, to crucify self when no one knows that you are crucifying self, to live not for self, and yet get no credit for such a life—this, my brethren, is the real hidden cross, which in the sight of God is the true test of the Christian. Be assured that that is not the real cross which gives you a secret self-complacency in taking it up. No, the real cross is just to be like Jesus Christ, concerning whom it is written, "For even Christ pleased not Himself."

How elevating on the character is the influence of this cross! When we make it our aim to please not ourselves, but God; when we have our own wills thwarted, resting satisfied with the will of God as in all circumstances the best; when purely and honestly we can say "Thy will be done," having no thought of getting a name to ourselves for gifts or for graces, for talents or for piety—then it is that we are raised to what may justly be called "the higher Christian life."

It is better, however, not to talk much about it. Every Christian has his *via dolorosa;* but if he is wise, he will walk it, for the most part, in silence. There is a subtle danger in telling others that you

are bearing an inward cross. Let it be a secret between yourself and God. Speak to Him about it. If you speak to your fellow-men, you are almost sure to contract a self-complacent spirit; you are almost sure to pose as a special object of sympathy; and then the danger is that you will come to think of yourself with satisfaction as having to bear such a cross. In that case, instead of the cross, it will be found that you are prematurely snatching at a crown. That is the mistake which many make. They want to be crowned when rather they should take up their cross and follow the Master. The day for crowning will come by-and-by; this is the day for cross-bearing. We are as yet too vain and self-sufficient for the crown; what we need meanwhile is humbly to bear the cross. It is the cross hidden, unseen by man, that imparts a genuine elevation to the character. The world will not understand the secret of it, even your fellow-Christians will scarcely suspect it; but your Father in heaven will recognise and remember every occasion when you gave up your will to His, and the day will come when you will wear the crown because you have borne the cross.

Observe, further, the *practical guiaance which it affords in all the affairs of life.* To some it may seem as if we were speaking of an ideal, unearthly, superhuman sort of life. Is it a life consistent with plain every-day work? In answer to this, permit me to remind you of the thought with which we started, that the value of any life is not to be estimated by the amount of work done, but by the principle which regulates it. The worth of your life goes far beyond what you do; it is to be counted by the spirit in which your work, whether great or small, is done. You may accomplish little; but if through grace you so live as to please God, you accomplish the main thing that is required of you. Some have to spend most of their time in humble tasks, each one of which may seem to be trifling. Let such remember that the principle of pleasing God may enter into the commonest duties. Beware of dividing your life into two halves, speaking of your Christian work and your worldly occupations. All work ought to be Christian work, and no occupation ought to be worldly. If you carry into every-day duties the spirit of Christ, you will raise them into what may justly be called

Christian work. On the other hand, any occupation in which you engage may become worldly if you pursue it with a mind that is set only on the things of earth.

Be not, then, restless or dissatisfied, so as to think yourself above the sphere where God has placed you. Depend upon it you have an opportunity just as real, though not so conspicuous, of winning what is best in life as those who live in the public eye. Indeed, in some respects your opportunity is better, for you have not the temptation to live to be looked at or to be talked about. You may rather thank God that the lot assigned to you is private, where you may serve Him with lowly hearts, and with singleness of purpose seek the honour of His blessed name.

Others are so situated in God's providence that they do not need to toil for their daily bread. Every day brings to them many hours of leisure. What is the application of the principle before us to such lives? It is this—think, pray, labour for the good of those around you. Your life ought to be in the proper sense of the term a ministerial life—a life more or less devoted to ministering to the temporal or spiritual

wants of others. Think for those who have not much leisure for thought, pray for those who have not much leisure for prayer, be helpful to those who have not much leisure to be helpful to others. If you are to please God, be useful to man. And if to please God is something to you more than a religious phrase, if it expresses the real aim of your life, you will not be left in the dark as to how you may best be useful to your fellow-men. You will discover that some talent in this direction has been committed to you, and it will be your endeavour to use that talent. You will see that it is a poor thing to live just to make oneself comfortable and happy. You will enter with sympathy into the words of the Apostle Paul, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

I wish to close with a few words on *the twofold sphere where this aim of the Christian is carried out.* This is expressed in the text by the words, "whether present or absent," or as in the Revised Version, "whether at home or absent." The terms used refer literally to the contrast between living permanently in a certain place, and travelling about from place to place. One eminent

commentator takes the expression in this literal sense, and supposes that the apostle says that wherever he went he had the same aim, whether living at his own home or on the move in his missionary travels. In reply to this it has been well asked where was the apostle's home? He had none; from the day of his conversion he was a homeless man.

The sense is given by throwing on the text the light of the previous verses. "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight:) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." We may be said to have two homes. As human beings living in this world our home is in the body; as Christian believers walking by faith, our home is beyond with the Lord. When we are at home in the body, we are absent from our home with the Lord; when we come to be with the Lord, we shall be absent from our home in the body. Our home life, however, in its aim is one. When we are at home with the Lord, we shall pursue the same object that we pursued when we were at home in the body.

We look forward to the time when not only there shall be one aim, but when the two homes shall be made one. That will be after the Resurrection. Then we shall be at home both in the body and with the Lord; then will our blessedness as redeemed human beings be complete, our souls perfectly free from sin, and our bodies made like unto Christ's glorious body. But even the disembodied spirit does not go forth himself; it finds a home where it may wait in blissful repose till the Resurrection. In that home it does not dwell in a state of unconsciousness. No, there, as here, the aim is to be pleasing with the Lord; there, as here, life finds its outflow in a joyful surrender to the will of Him who is highest and best. The homes are different, but the life is one. What we are in the body is what we shall be when with the Lord. How true it is that our home life is our real life. When we go forth to the outside world, there is often much that is artificial about us; those at our homes see us as we are. So it is what we are at home in the body that shall determine whether we can look forward to a home with the Lord.

Ah, brethren, do not say that one home

is enough; you need two. We cannot help feeling at home in the body. It is in the body that we carry on all the functions of life, that we see, that we hear, that we communicate with our fellow-men. The body is to be honoured, and, as we hope, in a higher state of being it will be our everlasting companion. Yet as those who will shortly be disembodied spirits, we need a home that shall then shelter us. That home the Lord Himself will afford us, if only we can say with truth, "Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him."

# THE NEW HEART.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."—EZEK. xxxvi. 26.

IN an earlier part of this prophecy it had been said, "I will do better unto you than at your beginnings." God had done much for His people at the beginning of their history in bringing them out of Egypt, in guiding them through the wilderness, and in placing them in the land of promise. They had but poorly responded to His goodness. They had rebelled against Him, relapsing again and yet again into idolatry. They had defiled the land by their own way and by their doings. They were now far off in a land of strangers, exiles from the home of their fathers. They had forsaken Jehovah, and yet He had not forsaken them. He sent His messengers to assure them that, whilst punishing them for their sins, He had a heart of compassion towards them. The

hope was held out to them of return to their own land; and in addition to that, there was set before them a series of promises concerning spiritual blessings that would do more for them than all the temporal advantages they had ever enjoyed. Yes, God was willing to do better with them than at their beginnings. They were to learn the lesson that has been repeated in every age of the Church's history, that there is always made possible to faith something better than has been known before. When trials come, when we are, as it were, in an exile land, we are apt to think that everything has been lost. The present is sad, and the future is dark and unknown. We have to be taught that, whilst we can discern nothing that is encouraging, the divine resources are not exhausted. God has something better for us than at our beginnings. We are to find that, not so much in new circumstances and surroundings as in a new heart and a new spirit, we are to get into a new world by ourselves becoming new.

To-day we enter on a new year, and what the year will bring to us in our outward life none of us can tell. It is natural that the young should have bright hopes, and we

wish to say nothing that may tend to dissipate innocent gladness. We who are older look at things from a more sober point of view. We have had many new years' days, and past experience has shown us how little we can count on anticipated happenings. We are not, however, to suppose that the freshness of life is for us gone for ever. It may be true that we do not expect things to become very different from what they are, that the future is likely to shape itself much as the past, or even that losses rather than gains are in store for us. All the more it becomes us to leave our minds open to those fresh springs that do not dry up. These are found through means of what is here spoken of as the new heart and the new spirit.

Observe what this implies. It implies that *there are objects corresponding to the renewed mind.* When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, it was felt that an unspeakable benefit had been conferred because there were things to look at. When He opened the ears of the deaf, there were the sounds of the human voice to be heard. Supposing we lived in a dark or a voiceless world, the restoration of eyesight or of the sense of hearing would not be regarded as a

blessing. There would be nothing corresponding to our eyes or our ears, and so we should remain unconscious of possessing such senses.

So it is with regard to what may be called the spiritual senses of which our text speaks. These have a value because there are objects to which they correspond. The words "a new heart and a new spirit" are in themselves vague and indefinite. We do not clearly perceive what they mean till we regard them in relation to the objects that they enable us to realise. We are apt to use the words as if they denoted merely a certain state of emotion or a certain change in our views. We do not consider sufficiently what it is that gives exercise to the new heart and the new spirit; and finding as a matter of fact that emotion fluctuates, and that our views easily vary according to the opinions which we hear expressed, we do not see how inward renewal can bring us lasting satisfaction.

Thus it may seem to us that one year is but the monotonous successor of that which preceded it. We do not understand that the very meaning of the new heart and the new spirit is to open our eyes to see what is

always old and always new; it is to open our ears to hear a voice that utters itself in tones of fresh significance. It is not into a dark or into a silent world that we are introduced. It is a world whose light enables us to see things that never cease to cause delight; it is a world where a voice is heard that never fails to charm.

The new heart is compared to a heart of flesh as contrasted with what is called a stony heart. Stone remains from year to year hard, insensible: flesh is sensitive, it feels when touched; when touched gently it may respond with pleasure; when touched roughly it may quiver with pain. So the new heart is all alive to impressions; it knows what affects it; it throbs, it palpitates in harmony to the influences that surround it. The law given through Moses was written on tables of stone. It is the promise of the new covenant that it is written on what the apostle calls the fleshy tables of the heart. The writing on stone was a record; the writing on the heart is an experience. The stone gives no response to what is written upon it. It recognises not the hand that touches it; it understands not the words that are traced on it; it obeys not

the commands that it expresses. Far otherwise is it with the heart that is a heart of flesh. It knows, it feels, it obeys. It yields itself to the impressions that are made upon it.

It is the new heart, the new spirit. Why is it called new? Does this mean that we get new souls, so that we become other persons than we were before? The illustrations already used from some of our Lord's miracles may here help us. When Jesus gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, He did not take out the eyes and the ears that the afflicted ones already had. He simply removed the obstruction that had prevented seeing and hearing. There had been something which hindered communication between these organs and the outer world. The miracle consisted in restoring that communication. The optic nerve became sensitive to light; the nerves of the ear became sensitive to sound. In excuse it might be said that new eyes and new ears were given, but only in the sense that the old eyes and the old ears were put into proper relation to the objects of sense. So when it is said that by God's grace we get the new heart and the new spirit, it is not meant

that a break is made in our personal identity. We do not cease to be the same beings that we were before. We are the same, though different. We have the same minds, the same faculties of thought, of feeling, and of desire. We are morally the same. Our consciences feel shame for the things done in previous years. Paul the apostle, though forgiven, had remorseful thoughts of the cruelties committed by Saul the persecutor.

Wherein lies the difference? It lies in our souls being *sensitive to the objects of the spiritual world.* The blind man in our own day who through surgical skill has his sight restored does not get new eyes, but his eyes get a new power. He is now in visual contact with the things around him. He no longer depends on the eyes of others for descriptions of what is going on. He sees with his own eyes, and that to him is a new experience.

This is the change which spiritually we have to undergo. It is not new souls that we need; it is a new communication with the things for which our souls were originally adapted.

The change is very great—so great that in the New Testament it is spoken of as a

*new creation.* It creates new impulses, new purposes, new motives. It does so because, if we may so express it, the nerves of the soul have been made sensitive to the objects of the spiritual world. It is with these objects that we have to occupy our minds if we wish to know whether we have got the new heart and the new spirit. What delight it gives the parents when their infant begins to notice the things around it. Before then there may have been a doubt whether its well-formed eyes were capable of seeing. The doubt vanishes when it responds to the mother's smile. On the other hand, what a pang it gives should it be observed that the infant shows no sign of recognition, that when a bright object is presented before it it seems to look on vacancy. The fear arises that those beautiful eyes are sealed to the light of day.

So is it with our souls born into the family of God. The sure sign that we have got the new heart and the new spirit is that we recognise the face of God, that we see in Him as revealed in Jesus Christ our God and Father, and that what gives us pleasure are the things in which something of His presence can be discerned. The new heart

is the heart that beats in response to His love; the new spirit is the spirit that penetrates beyond the seen and temporal, and finds exercise for its activities in the things that are unseen and eternal. Here there is ample room for constantly fresh endeavours. The narrowest life outwardly is large enough to afford opportunities of contact with the things that are measureless. There is no limit to the varied exercise of the new heart and the new spirit. It is not occupied with itself; it does not think much about its own renewed nature. What interests it are the grand objects to which that nature is akin. When we are admiring what is beautiful, we are not thinking of the clearness of our eyesight. When we are listening to fine music, we are too much absorbed to be congratulating ourselves on our good ears. The new heart is too much taken up with him who responds to its affections to spend time in contemplating itself; the new spirit is too busy with the things of the spiritual world to give prolonged attention to its own movements of feeling.

It is this which maintains that freshness of soul so much to be desired as the years go by. Our danger is to live on past ex-

perience. We believe that years ago, it may be in the days of youth, we passed through the great change of regeneration. A new world was then opened to our view. It interested us, it called forth the energies of our renewed nature, the objects which it presented occupied our thoughts more than all else. By degrees the sense of novelty wore off; and whilst we have never ceased to regard the things revealed in the Bible as of chief importance, they are not to us exactly what they were. We have become accustomed to remember that they once afforded us delight, and so we live rather on a memory than on a present experience.

Where lies our remedy? It is in putting to fresh use the knowledge we possess. We need not expect that new truths shall be revealed to us. What we have to look for is that the old truths may meet with new applications. The young Christian, for example, has little difficulty in assenting to the commonplace truth about the brevity of life. He may even take pleasure in it. He may rejoice to think that very soon he may be transferred to the heavenly glory. He leaps in imagination over the years of trial or of stern duty that may await him before he

enters on that glory. When he becomes older the truth wears a different aspect. It is not now a beautiful idea, it is an actual fact, that in a very short time not merely he may pass from earth, but he must do so. He has arrived at the period when he may know, not as a probability, but as a certainty, that the far larger part of his life here is over. How does he regard the truth now? What feelings does it awaken? Is it still a hope, or has it become a fear? Is it accompanied with chagrin and disappointment, or is it cheerfully accepted? Does he find that the truths of the gospel that in younger days were a source of gladness are sufficient to enable him to face with calm expectation the near prospect that is before him? Or is it that, still assenting to what nobody can deny, that life is brief, he tries as much as possible to forget it, and the older he gets puts away from him what was once supposed to be a bright anticipation?

That is an instance of how, as life goes on, we are called to apply to new circumstances old truths, and by so doing maintain its freshness. A similar remark might be made regarding other truths. If we want evidence of possessing the new heart and the new

spirit, it is in this direction that we must find it. Otherwise it may turn out that we have been mistaken in supposing that at any time in our lives we underwent the great change. Let us not trust to memory for the proof of it. Memory is often a very deceptive faculty. We know how it often plays us false in the common things of life. It is not to be depended on for the settlement of the momentous question whether we have the new heart and the new spirit. A far surer way is the present experience of the things of God meeting the wants of our souls. What is Christ to us now? What are we finding in Him to get through the trials of life and to meet the duties, often difficult, of the position in which we are placed? What about that plain and practical text referred to in the verses that follow? "And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." Do we feel the need of a Spirit better than our own, to walk the path of life and to obey the divine commandments? The new spirit, which is just the spirit of man renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God, is not a ghostly thing; it takes body and form by

expressing itself in obedience. It is made visible in the acts of the life. What we do is the incarnation of the spirit that we possess. May we be enabled during the year on which we have entered to give such embodiment to what we are, that it shall prove a year of blessing to ourselves and to all over whom we have influence.

# THE VOICE OF THE LORD.

"He heard the Voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat."—NUM. vii. 89.

IN the Revised Version these words are rendered in a manner more simple and telling—"He heard the Voice speaking unto him." He heard the Voice. The Voice is audible; it is heard. The Voice is intelligible; it speaks.

*The Voice is audible.* It is heard by those who desire to listen. Moses went into the tabernacle of the congregation to hear it. He separated himself from the people; he passed into solitude. God's voice is heard; it is heard by the soul that listens. Perhaps you say that you have never heard this voice. But have you listened? Have you gone into the tent of meeting? Have you ever desired to meet with God? You listen to many voices—the voice of the last popular book, the voice of the morning newspaper,

the voice of public opinion. These voices are heard; they are attractive; they win attention. Why is God's voice not heard? Not because it is silent, but because it is not attended to. You will hear, if you care to hear it.

*The Voice is intelligible.* It speaks. It is not mere sound; it has a meaning. It is the expression of thought. The mind of God comes into contact with the mind of man. When God speaks, He reveals. He reveals Himself. He gives forth what the mind may grasp.

Think for a little of some of the purposes of this Voice.

It is the Voice that *searches.* So it came to our first parents after the fall—"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool (literally the end of the day) of the day. . . . And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" So it is that this voice may still be heard. When the day's work is over, when the evening of life is approaching, when the toils of past years lie behind us, then, if we listen, the question may come to our consciences, Where art thou? Where do we stand? What is the position in which

we are placed by what we have done or by what we have failed to do? We know where we were at the beginning of life, when hope filled our breast, and when there opened up before us bright prospects. It seemed then that we might easily triumph and gain what we wanted. We did not know the subtle temptations we should have to encounter; we did not suspect the enemy that was lurking in our path; and we did not think how life would become complicated, and what influences to destroy us were at work. Where are we now? It is the Voice that asks the question. It is a searching voice. It searches your memory; it searches your conscience. Listen. Take advantage of the cool of the day. A lighter breeze is blowing than some of the tempestuous winds that shook you in the past. In the later years, in the quieter time, when the end is not far off, be willing that this voice should search you through and through.

It is the Voice that *thrills*.

So it came to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" (Exod. xix. 19). It was this voice

that sent such terror through the ranks of Israel, "which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more" (Heb. xii. 19). And why was it that this voice should have filled them with alarm more than all the other sounds that were to be heard? It was because more than all else it revealed God's near presence. It thrilled their souls to think that God was so near them. So there are times when the truth that we believe becomes vivid to us. We say that God is near; but if we hear the Voice at Mount Sinai, it is no easy assent that we give to such a proposition. At Mount Sinai we do not listen to men, we listen to God Himself.

The Voice heard there may cause a thrill of terror or a thrill of joy. The people of Israel for the most part were terrified, because they knew how little prepared they were for having such near intercourse with Jehovah. They intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. Very different were the feelings of Moses. When the voice of the trumpet sounded long and waxed louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. Never can this voice be heard without a thrill—a thrill

of terror or a thrill of joy. Which is it in our case? What feelings are awakened by some vivid impression that God in His holiness and majesty is speaking to us? Can we give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness, as did the psalmist? or, like the people of Israel, do we wish from the bottom of our hearts that God would speak to us no more?

It is the Voice that *encourages.*

It came to Elijah in his state of depression, and enabled him to pursue the work given him to do. His heart was saddened by the thought of his solitary position. It seemed to him that God's cause was about to fail, or at any rate that he was left alone to uphold it. He was startled by manifestations of the grand in nature, but they brought no message to his soul. The Lord was not in the wind nor in the earthquake nor in the fire. After the fire came a small still voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave. And behold there came a voice unto him and said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" It was the voice of encouragement, not without a tone of reproach. Elijah had spoken as if he were the only one in Israel that served

God. God let him know that he was mistaken, that there were seven thousand who had not bowed unto Baal. Instead of complaining, it became the prophet to be working. "What doest thou here?" Be ready for the tasks assigned to you, and you will find that you have been indulging gloomy, it may be also self-sufficient, thoughts.

Let the desponding Christian listen to this Voice, "What doest thou here?" The world seems to you going to ruin; the age in which we live is to you the worst age that has ever been known. You want some mighty manifestation of God's power to arouse men to a sense of their danger—be it wind, earthquake, or fire. Ah, you have yet to learn that it is not thus God reaches the human heart. And, for yourself, what are you doing? Instead of spending your days in moaning over the world's evil, would you not be better employed in doing such work as God lays to your hand? It is not through idle lamentations that your despondency will be overcome; it is by patient, earnest endeavour to fulfil God's will. You will gather courage by loving obedience, and you will discover what mistaken judgments you have passed on your

fellow-men. You have taken little account of the Lord's hidden ones; you had forgotten how many there are whose hearts cleave to the Lord with a true devotion, though by the obscurity of their lives they are unknown to you. Beware of becoming the judge of others; leave that to the Lord. Rather listen to the voice that to Elijah's bitter complaints said, "Go, return on thy way." In going the way marked out for you, you will gain brighter prospects, or at any rate you will not be found unfaithful to your Lord's commission.

It is the Voice that *testifies*.

Three times during our Lord's ministry this voice was heard—at His baptism on the banks of Jordan, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in Jerusalem after His triumphal entry into the city when His soul was troubled and He exclaimed, "Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." On each occasion the Voice gave testimony to Him as the object of the Father's love. As heard by the men of the older economy, it may be said to have been a prelude of the Incarnation. The human speech was an intimation that the divine nature was about to appear in

human form. Revelation had a progress. At the beginning of man's history the utterances were simple, we may say childlike, suited to the infancy of the human race. As the ages advanced the speech became fuller, more charged with meaning, until He came of whom it could be said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." So the Voice that from time to time had sounded forth along the period of preparation now had this for the burden of its message, "This is My well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him."

"Hear ye Him." In broken accents, as men were able to bear it, God in the past had spoken. Now His speech flows in a full stream through Him who is the perfect expression of the Father's mind. Hear Him if you would hear the Voice. On the last of the three occasions to which I have referred, when the Voice was heard, Jesus said, "This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes," and then in clear, decisive tones, interpreting its meaning, He uttered the profound words—"Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I,

if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The Voice heard through the ages, and now spoken by human lips, has brought about the crisis of the world's history. It is the critical time; it is to be seen that the world is not to be ruled by the devil; the prince of this world is cast out, he is dethroned; and Another has come to take his place. The rightful Lord of men has appeared. He will win His position, not by flattery or by fraud, but by suffering and death. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The Voice that searched man when he became a sinner, and thrilled his soul with terror at Sinai, now points to Calvary, and tells him that, if he would be delivered from the dominion of the tempter, he must look to the Crucified One, he must come under the sway of redeeming love, he must be drawn to Him who was lifted up as the grand object of faith.

This is the Voice that sounds forth in the gospel of the grace of God. The Saviour commanded that this gospel should be preached to all men for a witness. It is the Voice that testifies. It testifies of God's love to men; it testifies of His willingness

that all men should be saved. You have heard it with the outward ear. Have you heard it with the ear of the soul? That is what is needed to produce the great change.

Therefore once again observe—

It is the Voice that *converts.*

So it came to Saul of Tarsus—"And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Ere the period of revelation came to a close a striking instance was thus given of the abiding truth that the voice of God in conversion comes to the individual soul. In Saul's case there were special reasons why it should take a miraculous form. He was to be set apart not as a simple preacher of the gospel, but as an apostle commissioned to speak for his Lord, as one possessed of an authority equal to that of the twelve.

Apart, however, from this miraculous element, his conversion illustrates what is true of all men in whose souls the divine life has been awakened, that they are brought into such personal contact with the Lord that they know He has spoken to them. They hear the Voice. It comes to them through the gospel, heard, read,

and remembered. Some sermon or address is used to arouse them to the fact that God is speaking to them. They gain the conviction that the general call of the gospel is an invitation addressed to them individually, and as such they accept it, and discover for themselves the blessings which it offers. Or, as often happens, it is some book that in retirement arrests their attention. Best of all if it be God's own Book! As they read, the persuasion takes possession of them that is something more than human. The more they read, the more they ponder, the firmer grows the assurance that a divine hand was at work to produce such utterances, so piercing in their exposure of the human heart, so satisfying in their unfolding of the supply of human need.

At times it is neither through hearing nor reading that the Voice is recognised. The mind may be set agoing in various ways. It may be some outward trouble; it may be some inward disquietude. Often in the period of youth it is through the awakening of the mind's reflective powers. The young man or the young woman, no longer a child, is putting away childish thoughts. There

come thoughts of personal responsibility, thoughts of what can be made of life, thoughts of what it is to have a rational soul, and of what it means to be an immortal creature. It is then that a young soul may be startled to find that in solitude it is not alone.

What a surprise to be in a room all by oneself, and to be made aware that Another is near! What a sense of awe comes over you to hear in the silence a Voice! Ah, you did not expect it. In former times you were wont, as you had been taught, to repeat a few words of prayer when you got up in the morning and before retiring to sleep. But now, when you go to your room you feel that you are not speaking to the chair at which you kneel or to the air that surrounds you. You are speaking to a living Being. How has He made Himself known? He has spoken to you. The Voice has come to you. His Spirit has moved you. He has told you what you are; He has told you something about Himself. Ah, you are beginning to understand what Moses felt when he went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him and when he heard the Voice. To you it has come as

the Voice that converts. It has changed your life. You cannot go back to your old life, no more than Saul of Tarsus could have returned to his work of persecuting. The Voice that fell upon his ear penetrated to his soul, and henceforth the desire of his heart was expressed in the words, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" So may it be with you. Keep your soul in a listening attitude. Let not a day pass without being able to say, "Now I have heard the Lord speaking to me." And when our days on earth have come to a close, then shall be fulfilled, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

# REMEMBERED TRUTH.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—JOHN xiv. 26.

WE see in the Gospel narrative the fulfilment of this promise. With what marvellous accuracy the disciples gave the record of their Master's words. They were able also to enter into the meaning of these words in a way that they could not do when first they heard them. It was *remembered* truth that became so precious.

We believe that in their case there was a special illumination. God's Spirit gave them a power beyond that of the ordinary human faculties. We are not, however, to limit the promise to them. It is fulfilled still. We may claim an interest in it. It is part of the work of the Holy Spirit to quicken the faculty of memory. It is of this that I propose now to speak, endeavouring

to set before you what it implies, and what are the advantages connected with its results.

First of all, then, let us think *how the Holy Spirit influences the memory.* Progress in the divine life is marked by a deeper insight into revealed truth. This, however, does not mainly depend on the gaining of new information. Nor can it be said to depend much on processes of reasoning. It differs in this respect from our growth in secular knowledge. In the study, for example, of history or science, or of the practical arts of life, new facts are brought before us, and, reasoning upon these facts, we advance to larger and wider views. In spiritual knowledge the facts lie all before us. Nothing can be discovered beyond what the Bible tells us. Such a revelation of God's mind as He deemed needful for us has been given in His Word. Much indeed may be done in the way of a better understanding of that word. False interpretations may be corrected. Clearer light may be thrown on the bearing of one truth on another. It may be found that by laying undue stress on one aspect of a truth, another and equally important has been lost

sight of. Well-instructed Christians desiring to cultivate an intelligent faith will take advantage of all help to be obtained by a profounder study of Scripture. They will keep their minds open to receive whatever may enable them better to enter into the meaning of the treasures of that living message adapted to the successive generations of the Church's history.

Yet, whilst this is so, we may be satisfied that there is no essential change in the truths of "the common salvation." Nothing has taken place to alter the fact that we are sinners, and that in His great mercy God has provided a salvation suited to all men. Nothing has taken place to alter the fact that we need forgiveness and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Nothing has taken place to alter the fact that eternal life is enjoyed through the knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. These are things not to be discovered, but to be remembered. Hence the Apostle Paul, when referring to the great facts of the gospel, says to the Corinthians, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you." In a touching passage of St. Peter's writings we find the

words, "Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." And again, "I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance." It is remembered truth that saves; it is remembered truth that sanctifies.

Now, it may be asked, *How is the memory to be kept active in connection with divine truth?*

There is one thing about memory that we have all observed: *we remember best what interests us most.* We see and hear and read a great deal that quickly passes from our minds. On the other hand, we seldom forget what has thoroughly aroused our attention. That is why wise teachers always try to make their lessons as interesting as possible. They know that their scholars cannot be expected to retain what has never given pleasure. It will not make a permanent impression if learned only as a piece of task-work. But how can spiritual truth be made interesting to minds that, to use St. Paul's expression, are "carnal"? Naturally, what interests us are the things that meet our wants. We like to hear what is going on in the world; tell us news, and

you will interest us. We have imaginations that delight in the marvellous; tell us stories, and you will interest us. We feel our ignorance; give us information, and you will interest us.

Now, why is it that these things interest the mind? It is *because they supply a need of which we are conscious.*

If, then, spiritual truth is to awaken a like interest, it must correspond to some actual need of our souls. It is here where our Lord's promise about the Holy Spirit is seen to have such a meaning. It is the Holy Spirit who shows us our need. He awakens within us longings that have been stifled by the carnal propensities of our nature. In a later part of the discourse from which our text is taken, Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

If the truth of the gospel is not seen in its adaptation to our need, it will fail to interest us, and, failing to interest us, it will not be remembered. The Holy Spirit works in our memories by arousing into activity the faculty that is below memory. And what is that? It is *conscience.* Get

the conscience awakened, and the memory will not sleep. A man who realises that he is a sinner will not forget his need of pardon. A man who is alive to the fact that he is a responsible creature will not forget that he must answer to Almighty God for the way in which life is spent. A man who has come to know that nothing short of God can satisfy him will not forget to lift up his soul to God. It is his interest in these things that secures his continued remembrance of them.

The same principle is illustrated all along the course of the Christian life. We have a striking example of it in the case of our Lord's disciples. Jesus frequently spoke to them about His death. It is evident, however, that His words made little impression on their minds. They understood not the things which He said. Why did they not understand? Jesus spoke in plain language. He did not hide His meaning under parabolic figures. He told them that He would be crucified, and that on the third day He would rise from the dead. When He was actually arrested and brought before Pilate and sentenced to death, it all came upon them as a surprise. When the resur-

rection took place, they were slow to believe it. How strange! The simple reason was that the words of Jesus on the subject of His death had never really interested them. They did not as yet perceive the redemptive meaning of that death. They did not see it in the light of needed atonement for human guilt. Had Jesus told them that He was going to reign as a King in Jerusalem, there would have been no fear of their forgetting that. Such an announcement would have met their desires and kindled a quenchless interest. They would have treasured it in their memories; and when the event came, they would have been prepared to meet it.

It was not in vain, however, that their Master told them He must die. His words, though not understood at the time, became luminous when the Holy Spirit brought them to their remembrance. Henceforth His death and resurrection were the great themes of their preaching. Under the Holy Spirit's teaching they had learned the bearing of these facts on the salvation of men. Their eyes were opened, and they saw in the Cross a meaning that they had never seen before.

So it is with us. If we forget the Cross,

if we do not often think of the Lord Jesus suffering and dying, it is because the subject has never thoroughly interested us. And why have we not found interest in the Cross? It is because of our slight sense of sin; it is because we have not sufficiently seen in the Cross what can alone meet our need as sinners. If our conscience were more awake, our memories would be less asleep.

Let us ask, then, for the Holy Spirit, that He may teach us all things and bring all things to our remembrance, whatsoever Jesus has said. The prayers will be answered, not by the quickening of memory alone, but by the quickening of our whole moral and spiritual nature. You cannot have a good memory of divine things if you have a bad conscience, feeble desires after God, or a will inclined to evil.

Observe, in the second place, *some of the advantages connected with remembered truth.* These are what we call the ups and downs of life. These are life's emergencies. The idea is taken from a fluid of different elements, one of which emerges or suddenly rises to the top. Our lives for a while may present a smooth surface, but all at

once, when we are little thinking of it, something unexpected takes place. There bubbles up from some unknown quarter an element of disturbance.

These are the times when we are apt to be thrown off our guard; we are at a loss what to do. It is then that we need something at hand, some guidance that has not to be searched for but is within easy reach. At such times is seen the value of remembered truth. When a sudden sorrow overtakes us, or when we are placed in circumstances at once novel and trying, we need truth ready to spring up to our thoughts. It will not do to have to go in quest of it, or to obtain it through some proof of reasoning. It must be there beside us, within us, nearer than the words that fall from human lips.

Our Lord was thinking of this when He gave to His disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit. He knew that they would soon be in an unexpected situation. A great emergency in their lives was about to take place. He wanted to assure them that He was making provision for it. When it came, they would find that what He had said to them had a meaning deeper far than

they had supposed, that it was the utterance of truth suited exactly to their new position.

That is what remembered truth may do for us. We do not know what is before us. We cannot see the future with the many changes it will bring. What we have now to be concerned about is to have in our minds what will then be of practical use. Woe be to us if we have then to engage in a laborious search! Life with its ups and downs does not leave room for a perpetual inquiry. We must have in our memories, in our hearts, the treasure of the gospel. Blessed for us if amidst the varied circumstances of this changing scene the Holy Spirit is evermore bringing to our remembrance what Jesus has said!

The value of remembered truth may also be seen when we think of life's temptations. Temptation comes from unexpected quarters. It rises often suddenly in our minds, and we may be carried away by sinful thoughts into forbidden regions. It rises often suddenly in our lips, and before we have time to reflect we may give utterance to bitter and unseemly language. It rises often suddenly in our intercourse with our fellow-men, and

we may be led to yield to their suggestions without considering how much evil there may be in them. On all such and similar occasions we need to have in our memories what will prompt us to say quickly, as did Joseph in the moment of sore temptation, "How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" Nothing is so helpful as to recall immediately some word or saying of Scripture like a weapon ready at hand to meet the foe. They whose minds are empty of God's Word are ill furnished for conflict with sin. "Thy word," says the psalmist, "have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

Another advantage connected with remembered truth is that it preserves the continuity of the spiritual life. The author of that beautiful French hymn known to many of us, "Je suis à toi," was written in early youth by one who unhappily in after years lost all faith in the gospel. His life was broken. The truth which he had once preached with such singular fervour slipped from his mind, and by the time he reached middle age it had no interest for him, and his last years were spent in the dreary region of sceptical speculation. His biography is that of a man

whose life was cut in twain. It is, indeed, like the biography of two different men, the one renouncing what the other held most dear. It is one of the saddest examples I know of a break in the continuity of the spiritual life. It is perhaps not uncommon in these days to make a similar break with early beliefs, though to a less striking degree. If we are to be preserved from so painful a division in our inner history, we need the protection of remembered truth.

It is by memory that we have the evidence of our personal identity. We know we are the same living beings because we preserve the recollection of our past experience. It is the memory of revealed truth that preserves what may be called our spiritual identity. As life goes on, when the truth that brought God near to us in other days is still the food of our souls, what a growing persuasion we gain of the reality of the spiritual life. The unbroken link of faith becomes stronger. We get the assurance that it need not be snapped asunder by the rude shocks of time. The conviction takes possession of us that such a faith may stand the rude shock of death. We realise that

the immortal life beyond will be continuous with the life here enjoyed.

Let us depend, then, on the Holy Spirit for a sanctified memory. Let us pray that He may enable us to keep alive all holy recollections. With whatever else our minds are stored, may they retain with ever fresh interest whatsoever Jesus has said to us!

There may be some who remember much of the *form* of divine truth, but who have never felt its *power*. Do not think lightly of what you have thus learned. It is like a fire prepared but not yet kindled. The wood is all arranged, and it only waits the match to be applied, when it will burst into flame. Your knowledge of truth may at present do little for you. It does not comfort you; it does not guide you; it does not give you peace. It is there in your mind like the dry wood in the fireplace. Ah! it may be that soon a spark will fall upon it, and what a difference there will be! In a moment God's Spirit may kindle into flame what lies within you. The truth that you have heard a thousand times without interest may have suddenly imparted to it a power that shall arouse into activity your whole moral nature. Your conscience, your desire,

your will may wake up, and you may find yourself in a new world. You may hear a voice saying to you, "Remember, remember, remember." In that hour your memory will seize hold of things that seemed to have been forgotten, and what Jesus Christ the Saviour has said will become of more consequence than all the world besides.

## THE SILENCE OF GOD.

"But He answered her not a word."—MATT. xv. 23.

THE story of this miracle is at first sight perplexing. It seems so unlike our Lord's usual manner of dealing with suffering. Was He really unwilling to respond to the appeal made to Him for help? It looks as if the blessing were wrenched from Him rather than given freely. Further reflection teaches us that Jesus must have had reasons for taking such an attitude of apparent repulse. We feel sure that from the first He meant to grant relief to this afflicted mother. His attitude must have been best both for her and for those who were witnesses of the scene. At any rate, we know that the record of what was done on this occasion has encouraged the faith of multitudes ever since. Many a soul has found in this narrative what was not found elsewhere. The fact indicates that it contains what corre-

sponds to certain elements of Christian experience. It shows that that which at first sight is strange may be in accordance with what the Lord deems needful for the training of His people in the exercises of faith and obedience.

The point to which I wish specially to turn your thoughts is *the silence of Jesus.* "He answered her not a word." Silence on the part of our fellow-men is in certain circumstances peculiarly hard to bear. It may betoken indifference or contempt, or a firm resolve to have nothing to do with us. A beggar feels this. He has more hope of words of refusal than of no words at all. He can argue with what is said, but when nothing is said his heart fails; he has to turn away in disappointment. I suppose an author would rather that his book should meet with severe criticism than that it should remain quite unnoticed. An applicant for some office would prefer to have reasons assigned for a refusal of his request than that it should be passed over without recognition. Silence in such cases is felt to be so exasperating. More terrible to bear is the silence of God. A stillness out of which no response comes is crushing. We

feel as if a silent God were no God at all. If there be a living God, why should He not speak? It is the trial of faith that many have to pass through. When they pray, they seem to be speaking only to the surrounding air; the heavens over their heads are as brass, cold, unmoved, deaf to all their appeals. What is the meaning of it?

Perhaps the story before us may help us so far to understand it. What followed gave the opportunity for eliciting a beautiful trait in the character of this woman's faith. She had a deep sense of her unworthiness. It was no shock to her faith to be told that she belonged to an outcast race; she accepted the fact at once. She felt that she was an outcast individual of that race. When Jesus intimated that His ministry was confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, she had nothing to object. Rather she seems to have gathered encouragement. "Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" When the Lord further addressed her in the apparently harsh terms, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs," she was not daunted. The ready reply came to her lips, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs

eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

A faith like this was evidently connected with a *profound conviction of unworthiness.* She was willing to take the lowest place assigned to her. If she was classed with the dogs rather than with the children seated at their father's table, she saw the justice of the comparison, and drew from it fresh encouragement. She had no idea of being anything better. In her own eyes she was nothing, and yet she did not despair.

It is this which throws light on the fact that at the first the Lord's silence did not quench all hope of relief. Most people thus dealt with would have turned away, carrying in their breasts a sense of injured pride. They would have said, Surely we deserve better treatment than that. It was not so with this woman. We do not know her past history. We are only told that she was a Gentile. She had been brought up amidst heathen darkness. It may be that in some way she had heard of the true God. It is evident that she had gained a certain knowledge of Jesus as One who healed the sick, and who had compassion on the miserable.

However scanty had been her opportunities of religious training, she had arrived at very humble views of herself. The silence of Jesus may have surprised her, but it did not extinguish the dawning of faith that had begun to glimmer in her soul. On the contrary, it seems to have deepened within her the conviction that whatever good she might obtain must flow from pure mercy. It was for this purpose doubtless that the Lord dealt with her in the way He did. His silence was an intimation that it was well for her to expect nothing on account of any merit of hers. He wanted her faith to grow out of a soil softened by a tender sense of sin. It was to her in her present state the best kind of speech that could have been addressed to her. It tested her humility and her earnestness. Had she been proud, she would have resented it; had she been less earnest, it would have so discouraged her that she would have turned away without making any further appeal. It was because she was truly humble and intensely earnest that the silence of Jesus became to her a means of blessing.

It is often so still. The silence of God shows what we are. If it irritates us, that

may be because we thought we had a right to get an immediate response. We are angry, like one who expects to be admitted at once into some door where he is kept waiting. We see no reason for such delay. Why is not our request attended to? Why does not answer come just when we want it?

It is a symptom that we think of ourselves more highly than we ought. If we looked at the matter in the right light, we might see sufficient cause for such silence.

Have we not often been silent to God when He spoke to us? Is it not the case that there have been times in our history when we were willingly deaf to His voice? He spoke to us in His providence, filling our lives with some great joy; but in our ingratitude we received it without any acknowledgment of His goodness. We took His gifts as a matter of course, and had no thought of using them but for our own gratification. Now they have been withdrawn, and some great sorrow has entered our hearts, and we expect that at once He should come to our relief. We wonder why our prayer is not answered. We speak, but the heavens over our heads

are dumb; no voice comes to cheer us in the bitterness of our grief. We feel indignant. Why should we be treated thus? Why are we left to a silent God?

Ah! why? We may well ask the question. We ask it in our pride; we should ask it in contrition. Why should God speak to us when we have been so silent to Him? Why in our distress should He come to our aid when so long we have enjoyed His gifts and never even thanked Him for them? Why should He now speak to us when in the fulness that came from His hand we never cared to speak to Him? He loaded us with His benefits, and we grasped them as if we had merited them, and never did we seek to use them for His honour. They are now taken from us, and we assume the attitude of being wronged.

We are mistaken. This silence of which we complain should teach us a lesson. It is meant to be *a rebuke to our pride and self-sufficiency*. If we were humble like the woman in the story before us, our complaints would cease, and, instead of being vexed, our feeling would be one of penitence, causing us to realise that we deserve nothing from Him against whom we have

sinned so deeply. The silence of God may remind us how sinfully silent we have been —how we have abused His gifts and turned a deaf ear to the voice of His Word.

It may also serve the purpose of testing our *earnestness.* Had this woman been less in earnest, the silence of Jesus would have quenched her ardour. As already noticed, it seems to have had the contrary effect. It aroused all the more her intense desire for blessing.

It is always so in really earnest souls. They cannot believe that the Lord is unwilling to bless them. It is not because they think they deserve blessing; it is because that, like Jacob at Peniel, they are constrained to say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." There is something within them which even silence does not daunt. The desire for good has become with them a passion; they cannot do without it.

*God has different ways of testing us.* One of these is to leave us for a while to ourselves. We profess to have a longing for spiritual good. It may be that our longing is of a very moderate kind, proceeding rather from the wish to possess what may give a sort of completeness to other things

on which our hearts are most of all set. We think of grace as the ornament of nature. There is a beauty in Christian character that we cannot help admiring, and it seems to us that to partake of it would add a charm to life's enjoyment. We wonder, perhaps, why we do not get what we say we are thus anxious to obtain. We feel that nothing comes of our prayers or our efforts. No change has taken place in our experience. We are just what we were, it may be, years ago. There are times when anxiety becomes deeper, and we are stirred to a somewhat keener sense of our need. These times, however, pass away, and we have no assurance that God has heard our requests or given us what we asked.

We cannot tell why, but it seems to us that He is still the silent God. In hours of reflection we are perplexed; in hours of absorption with the affairs of life we are inclined to take it more easily, and to say that no doubt it will all come right at last. If we would better consider the matter, we might come to the conclusion that God is not really silent. He is testing us to see whether or not we are in earnest. The

blessing is delayed, because in spite of what we say we are half-hearted in seeking it. In the depths of our souls there is something else we are clinging to. We are not so eager for spiritual good as was this afflicted mother for the recovery of her child. If we examine ourselves closely, we cannot pretend that there is nothing we so much wish as to get blessing to our souls. God cannot speak to us and communicate the blessing against our wills. The Spirit of God does not act like the forces of nature. The forces of nature act by necessary law; the Spirit of God acts by free consent. There is nothing constrained in His working. If with our whole hearts we do not desire His presence, He does not force Himself upon us.

We need not, therefore, wonder why God is silent. He is silent because we are not thoroughly in earnest for Him to speak. Were He to speak to us in our present state, we could not understand His words.

That is what men forget when they say that if God's voice were heard sounding forth through the open heavens, they would believe in Him and become all that they ought to be. What is a voice unless it

meets with an ear prepared to receive it? What was the voice of Jesus to those who had no inward disposition to take in the meaning of what He said? It was a sound, and nothing more. The unbelieving heard it, and they were nothing the better. The half-hearted heard it, and they remained unsatisfied. It was only those who were like this Syrophenician woman, humble and aroused to intense desire, or like the penitent publicans and sinners, or like the docile Mary who sat at His feet,—it was such as these who profited by His words.

No mere outward demonstration addressed to the senses can change the heart. God's voice can only be heard by the soul, and the soul can only hear when it chooses to listen. It is vain, then, to complain of the silence of God; it is vain to say that He answers us not a word, if we are not giving to Him the attention of our whole hearts. His silence is the answer best suited to our case. He wants us to discover for ourselves that no other voice can meet our need. He wants us to find out that in the expression of our desire for His speaking to us we were in great measure deceiving ourselves. If we take His silence

meekly, if it humbles us, if it leads us, as in the case of this Gentile mother, to recognise our unworthiness, then we may expect to hear words of true consolation. What He found in her was that which pleased Him best. It was not her ready wit, of which certainly she made such admirable use. It was her faith. In spite of all that looked in a contrary direction, she gave up her soul in trustful confidence to Him whom she did not hesitate to address as her Lord. Jesus loved to be trusted. He took the opportunity on this occasion of assuming an outwardly harsh demeanour just in order that this woman's trust might be seen more clearly. The greatness of her faith was shown through means of the difficulties which it overcame. In other forms the same thing has appeared through the long course of the Christian ages. Again and again faith has clung to its Object in silence and in seeming devotion, and has proved victorious.

*It is such a faith that is needed to-day.* The silence of God is often felt to be oppressive. There are hours when the stillness produces almost a sense of terror. Oh, if He would but speak! oh, if He would

but answer some of the questions that leap to our lips! But no; He answers us not a word. What are we to do? This is what He enables us to do. He gives us to know that He is One whom we may absolutely trust. It is a conviction of which silence cannot deprive us. We may now see some of the reasons for this silence; but we shall go on trusting Him till it pleases Him to unfold them fully in that region where no words of man shall put false interpretations on His ways.

## THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA.

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."—REV. xxi. 6.

ONE of the most wonderful things about language is the vast multitude of words formed by the varied combination of a few letters. Take up, for example, an English dictionary. There you have before your eyes many thousands of words, but they are all composed out of twenty-six letters. It reminds us of nature. When we look around us, we see an infinite variety of objects. They differ in form, colour, weight, and subsistence; but a chemist will tell you that when analysed they are all found to consist of a few primary elements. Our bodies, which are so complicated, having so many organs, each with its different function, can be reduced to five or six, I don't know if even so many, elementary substances. So it is with the human mind. Society consists

of a great variety of character, and the social system is at work on an immense multiplicity of objects; but when we ask what are the desires which set them all in motion, or what are the springs of endeavour out of which they issue, we arrive at a few instinctive passions of human nature. One man differs from another; but below the thing in which they differ there is that which is common to mankind as a whole. History is just a repetition in varied form of the same human motives. It is this which is suggested by the text. God speaks of Himself in a way that reminds us how He adapts Himself to the complexity of human nature, and then man is addressed in words that go direct to what is deepest in the human heart.

"*I am Alpha and Omega.*" We generally quote these words as an expression of the divine grandeur. We are right in doing so, for their interpretation is given in what follows—"The beginning and the end." I think, however, we shall not be wrong if we also regard them as an expression of the divine humility. They are the names of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God is here accommodating Himself to human speech. He is taking note of the

fact that we are able by a few symbols which we call letters to present to the eye the invisible thought of our minds, and so to carry on communication with one another even when no sound issues from our lips. There is no word written but what is formed by uniting two or more of these symbols. They are few in number, but they are sufficient to make all the words of which any volume, however large, consists.

Why are so many words needed? It is because, first of all, we are surrounded by so many objects that require to be distinguished from one another. We read in the Book of Genesis that God brought to Adam the various animals to see what he would call them. Man was divinely prompted to give to each thing he saw a particular name; not the animals only, but all that the earth produces, the flowers, plants, and trees, and, besides, all the different parts of the earth itself, the mountains, rivers, and valleys, and then, beyond, the sun, moon, and stars. Everything that could be spoken about had to be named.

That, however, is only the half of human speech. The necessity came to express man's relation to these various objects, how

he acts upon them, and how they act upon him. Words were constructed to denote what we feel when we look at these things, what we think about them, how we desire them, or how we shrink from them. So arose what we call the language of ideas and of the different emotions of the mind. Words were needed to express human thought and endeavour, all that man has in his mind, and all that he attempts to accomplish.

Now, when God says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," He is telling us that what man is as a thinking, speaking, active creature, owes its origin to Him who is the creator of all and the final end of all. He is assuring us that the vast complexity of human effort based on a few simple elements is under His control, and is tending in one way or another to the fulfilment of His purposes.

It is not a definition of what God is in Himself; it is a statement of how He is related to creatures capable of thought and speech. He Himself does not need what is denoted by Alpha and Omega; speech in our sense of the term does not belong to Him. He is above the necessity of language.

The eternal Son is called the Word as the full and perfect expression of the divine Mind. When God is said to speak to us, the meaning is that through means of the words He is pleased to accommodate Himself to the limitations of our finite nature by imparting to us a knowledge of Himself. He is to us Alpha and Omega because not otherwise could we receive any communication from His invisible presence. When in condescension to our weakness He calls Himself Alpha and Omega, He wishes us to take in the wonderful thought that all things spring from Him and that all things tend to Him. We are reminded that we are creatures living on earth as complicated a life as the language we use, but that all this complexity of life is known to Him, and that to His eye its manifold diversities of activity are reduced to the simple elements of human nature, even as a language with its thousands of words is based on its alpha and omega, or, as we would say, on its a b c.

Now let us observe *how, in appealing to man, God passes from the varied manifestations of human endeavour to that which is central in our nature*—"I will give unto him

that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Our scientific men have long been working at the problem of reducing to its simplest elements the matter which we see and handle. We used to be told that these could be reduced to about sixty. More recent researches have shown that that number is much too large, and some are inclined to think that all matter is but a manifestation of the one force of electricity. However that may be, we may use the theory as an illustration of the subject now before us. Is there any one word that can be applied to all the exhibitions of human effort? If there is such a word, I think we may find it in our text. It is the word *thirst.* Science is a thirst for knowledge, art for beauty, music for harmony, literature for the expression of what is disclosed by nature and by human life. All men are athirst for something. The man of active mind and of strong body, even if he has not to toil for his daily bread, has a thirst for work. He is miserable when he is not doing something. The man again who is overworked thirsts for repose; he longs for the blessedness of rest. The invalid thirsts for health.

Almost all men thirst for life; they want to live as long as possible. A few crushed by sorrow, or afflicted with a melancholy disposition, thirst for death; and if they were not restrained by conscience, and, like Hamlet, by the fear of what comes after death, they would put an end to themselves. The vain man thirsts for appearance; the proud man for superiority; the envious man for the suppression of those who are thought better than himself. The studious man thirsts for retirement, the frivolous man for amusement, the sensual man for coarse delights. The orator thirsts for speech; the religious devotee for silence, as Catherine of Siena, of whom it is said that for three years she never opened her lips but to God and her confessor. The disinterested man thirsts for the good of others; the selfish man for his own enjoyment; the discontented man for he knows not what. The sinner awakened to a sense of the evil of his life thirsts for peace of conscience; the man of bad habits who has come to feel the fetters that bind him thirsts for moral liberty. The saint thirsts for holiness; the man stirred by the fervours of spiritual aspiration thirsts for God.

So it is that wherever we turn, into whatever department of life we penetrate, we observe the same undercurrent of desire.

Amidst all the differences we meet in our survey of the world, when we look below the surface, we come into contact with the region of longing. There is no man but what thirsts for something or other. It is like nature with its myriad forms heaving underneath some hidden force that guides its activity.

It is here where the words of our text reveal the divine wisdom and love. God addresses the central part of our nature. He lays His finger, so to speak, on the one universal feeling of mankind. The utterance is not for this or that man; it is for all men wherever they are or however occupied. He offers to supply our need freely. The world is full of people who in the experience of thirst painfully realise the restraints that surround them. They cannot get what they want. They are hampered by outward circumstances, and they are hampered still more by an inward inability to find pleasure in the things that they obtain. Some set their minds on things that are beyond their reach, and others discover that the things

they have grasped fail to meet their desires. There is nothing more common than unalloyed thirst. How many thirst for companionship, and have to go through life lonely and friendless? How many thirst for a love greater than they ever enjoy? How many thirst for a happiness that never comes to them? It is this which causes such a sense of contradiction in human life. We are like people wandering through a sandy desert where no spring of water can be found. We are like prisoners where there is no possibility of escape.

How wonderful, then, the invitation!—"I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely." It comes from Him who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. It may be, as some expositors think, that, as here used, it is the language of God the Father, but we know that in the first chapter of this book the same divine titles are attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly the words of the invitation recall much that fell from the lips of Jesus during His ministry on earth. Our minds at once recur to the conversation which He held at Jacob's well with the woman of Samaria. We think, too, of what on another

occasion He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

Keeping all that in view, the special point before us now is, that if the deepest thirst of our soul is to be quenched, it must be by Him who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Consciously or unconsciously there is at the bottom of our hearts the desire for Him who *was* when all things came into existence. Men of thought feel that their minds cannot rest till they arrive at the First Cause of the universe. People who do not think much, but who are moved by vague longings, are always finding out that somehow things, however many or however large, fail to afford the satisfaction they expected. Along with this there is the constant desire to stretch forward to the End to which all things are tending. Again and again the question arises, What is to be the issue of this strange scene which we call human life? Reflective minds often ask it under the pressure of perplexity and doubt; minds that are not reflective are yet restless with the feeling that they do not succeed in reaching the fulfilment of their wishes.

It is to all of us in this state of mental thirst that He who is the Alpha and the

Omega, the beginning and the end, says, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely."

In Him we find the *beginning;* in Him we find the *end.* When we come to Him we come to the Source of all things. We come to the Source of our own being. We rise above all creatures; we repose in the arms of the infinite and blessed Creator revealed to us in Jesus Christ as our Father.

We come to Him who is the End of all things. We see that His presence fills the void where all created things come to an end. We are no longer afraid of an empty world. He who is the End of all things becomes our End. We are not afraid of emptiness beyond ourselves. At one time it seemed to us that if we did not live to ourselves we did not live at all. We could not imagine anything better than just to secure our own happiness, to make everything minister to our own enjoyment, to be content with ourselves. Now as we drink of the water of life we see how mistaken we were. We see that our own happiness is not the end of existence. We see that our End is He who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. We discover,

if we may use such an expression, that He is the unending End. When we were the end to ourselves, this was the fear that haunted us, that the time would come when no longer we could find pleasure in ourselves. Now and again we had a glimpse of our inherent poverty and misery, and the thought came over us, What if we should get into a state when pleasure in ourselves would come to an end? What then would there be to live for? What could we do for ourselves when the sight of ourselves only filled us with shame and disgust? Ah! that was a terrible thought. It produced anguish and dismay. How were we delivered from it? It was by the voice of Him who said to us, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely." Oh, it was a welcome voice. When we drank of the water of life our eyes were opened. We saw that He who is that water of life is the everlasting End of our being. We saw that our End is endless. Wherever we may be, in this world or the next, there He is to be the End towards whom our desires, our affections, our endeavours may reach forth without fear of disappointment.

Come, then, ye thirsty souls, and drink

of this water. Come, ye who long for pardon, and partake of the forgiveness that is offered freely. Look to Him who suffered and died for the remission of sin. Be willing that the blood that was shed on Calvary should be the atonement of your guilt. Come, ye who are oppressed with the ever-recurring power of sin. The water of life will give you new tastes and desires, and, in longing for holiness, you will rise into that purer atmosphere where the love of sin will no longer darken your horizon. Come, ye who realise how poor and aimless are your lives, how little you are making of them because you have been living to yourselves. This water is the water of life. When you drink it you will learn the true meaning of life. He who is the Alpha will show you that He is also the Omega; He who is the beginning is also the end. He will become your end, and you will be remembered amongst those of whom it is said, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise."

## JACOB'S DREAM.

"And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."—GEN. xxviii. 15.

ALL sure hope for the future depends on what we see in the present. We may wish indeed many things of which our present experience gives us no warrant that we shall ever obtain them. Naturally we desire health and outward prosperity, but we cannot be certain that such blessings will be granted to us. Our present health or prosperity may afford a probability that they will be continued, at least for a time; but we do not know. They may be taken from us at any moment.

It is different with spiritual blessings. When we get a sight of these as desirable, we already to some extent possess them. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

Our present hunger is the assurance of being filled. So it is with knowledge. When we hunger after knowledge, we already know. We know the excellence of knowledge. We have got beyond that ignorance which cares not to know. This knowledge gives us the assurance that we shall know more. It is what we see in the present that makes us sure of what we shall obtain in the future.

This truth is illustrated by the story of Jacob's dream. The heavens were opened to him, and on the mystic ladder reaching from earth he saw the angels of God ascending and descending. Immediately came the promise of a glorious future. His future was secured by what he saw in the present. The soul that is open to heavenly communications cannot doubt that whatever comes will be charged with blessing.

Our immediate concern, therefore, is not with the *future* but with the *present.* We have no definite knowledge of the future. We may have a probable knowledge of what our future in this life may be. All our conjectures, however, may be falsified by coming events. Things may occur that will make the future quite different from what we expected. As to the future beyond this

life, we know nothing. God has hid it from us, and neither reason nor imagination can tell us what the eternal ages will disclose.

This is the pathos of human existence. The only certainty is that we shall die; but what will come after death lies in a region of utter conjecture. If we say that we hope all will be well, we are indulging in a vague expectation that has nothing sure upon which to rest. We need something more than that. We need a hope able to support us in days of doubt and in days of suffering. For, say what we will, we may be tossed about by conflicting opinions, or we may be thrown into circumstances that will take all brightness out of our lives. It is useless to go on through life repeating that all things will turn out for the best. We may find that all things do not turn out for the best. The best may recede from us farther and farther, and the longer we live the more hopeless we may become. We may discover that our former expectations deceived us, and that we have around us only a dreary scene of desolation and of solitude.

What, then, we have to be concerned about is to have something in the present

that we may lay hold of as *a sure guarantee for what the future may bring.* It is what corresponds to the vision that Jacob got in the days of his youth when he saw the ladder that reached from earth to heaven.

That this ladder was meant to have an abiding significance, we gather from the allusion made to it in the words which our Lord addressed to Nathanael. To Jacob was revealed the grand truth that there is a way of communication between earth and heaven. He may not have perceived all that this truth implies, but at least he grasped the conviction that God is not far from earth. He felt assured by his own experience that the soul is capable of being visited by God's presence. The fact was to him awe-inspiring. When he awoke from sleep he exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven."

Our Lord's use of the incident is to tell us that the truth revealed to Jacob is made known to all who have faith in Him as the Son of man and the Saviour of the world.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This is what is made possible to us. It is to see God in Jesus Christ, and to gain the profound conviction of there being a way of approach from earth to heaven.

It is the dream of the soul. When we awake we find it to be a great reality. Our souls are visited with longing that no earthly object can meet. Ah! we think if it might be that we could see God. Oh for some vision that would tell us that He is near! Oh for something before our eyes that would show us that earth is not cut off from heaven! Is it not possible to get above the soil on which we tread, above the atmosphere which surrounds us, above the blue sky which in its azure depths hides regions of inexpressible beauty?

Ah! it has been the dream of ardent souls through all the ages. Millions have longed for intercourse with the Infinite One. Again and again the words of prophecy have been fulfilled, "Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." Old men who, in

spite of their long intercourse with the hard facts of life, have not lost the charm of the ideal, and young men who, like Jacob, are setting out from the familiar scenes of home, wistfully anticipating the strange sights that may meet their eyes in the new spheres before them,—these and all of every age who have aspired for something better than the things of sense have dreamed dreams and seen visions, and God has shown them that their dreams had a reality behind them, and that their visions were visions of what is eternal.

How does He show this? It is by the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ His Son. Christ is the true Ladder. In Him the heavens are opened and God is made known. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." When we find God in His Son Jesus Christ, we awake to the grand reality of communication between earth and heaven. We had dreamed of its possibility; now it becomes actual. Our souls are filled with awe, with reverence, with gratitude. We are prepared to contemplate the future in a way we could never do before. For now

there comes to us the promise, "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whithersoever thou goest; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

When a man receives a fortune, as it is called, it is said that his future is assured to him. There is no more anxiety about the means of subsistence. He looks forward with confidence to days of ease; he feels that he has at command what can fully satisfy his wants. He had dreamed of prosperity, and, now that it has come, fear and doubt are banished from his mind. In a far deeper and truer sense that is the case with the man who has awoke to the reality of God's presence. He discovers that everything the soul longs for is included in the words, "And, behold, I am with thee."

When God is with us, we can really want for nothing. We may have to meet temporal losses and many forms of trial, but we know that these cannot deprive us of our best and highest possession. Our future is assured. We do not know what our future in its circumstances may be, but the essence of its welfare is made sure. So

long as we are true to the reality that has been disclosed to us, we may have the confidence that no event in life can finally injure us. So long as we are faithful to Him who promises to keep us in all places whither we go, we need not fear our changeful lot. What we have seen projects a ray of light into the coming days. We may appropriate the fulness of the promise, "For I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." What God means to do He will do perfectly. He will not take us on the way so far and then leave us to shift for ourselves. He will be with us unto the end. As it is said of Jesus, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Or to give the promise in the setting of the Epistle to the Hebrews according to the Revised Version, "Be ye free from the love of money, content with such things as ye have; for Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee."

When our turn of mind is to be free from the love of money, and when we cherish a contented spirit, we may expect to realise all that the promise means. If

at any time its sufficiency is less clear, it is because our eyes are not single. Our hearts are clinging with excess of fondness to money or to the things that money procures. We are becoming discontented with the provision which our Father in heaven has made for us. The reality which was revealed to us when we awoke from the dream of our souls has somewhat faded from our vision. So it comes about that we do not find such continued comfort from the assurance, "For I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

We cannot but feel that it must have been so with Jacob. In the years that followed this incident of his life, he grasped too much at earthly goods. His mind became set on the flocks of his father-in-law, and he expended his ingenuity in securing them. His family life became clouded. His beloved Rachel died, and his sons followed evil courses. He had years of sadness when he believed that Joseph was also dead. Before the end came his faith revived; but doubtless that revival of faith was accompanied with many tears of penitence. At Peniel he had learned how vain

it is to strive against God; but the lesson was far from being fully learned. It would have been different with him had he turned his mind from the love of money, and had he been content with such things as he had. He would have continued to draw deeper consolation from the promise given to him in the days of his youth, and in old age he would not have been so ready to exclaim, "All these things are against me."

So perhaps has it been with many of us. In our early days we had dreams of unearthly blessedness; and when we awoke to the life of faith, we found the fulfilment of our dreams in our Lord and Saviour. We laid hold of the promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." It gladdened us; it gave us the prospect of a bright future. Why has the brightness so much faded? Our consciences tell us the reason. It is because we have become so involved in the things of earth. We have indulged in covetous desire, and have contracted the discontented spirit. The promise does not seem so full of meaning as once it did. Ah! let us recognise the fact that it is because we have not lived up to its meaning. May we now lay hold of it afresh, and,

looking forward to the great future of the eternal world, we may discover that it is yet sufficient to meet all emergencies, that it can enable us to face death and the realities of the unseen, that then, as now, God our Saviour and our Portion will say to us, "I will be with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest."

"Whithersoever thou goest." We sometimes speak of life as a drama; but it is a drama whose successive scenes are unknown to us till we have to take our part in them. We cannot tell as the years advance what the lifting of the veil will disclose. When we were children, how unable we were to predict what we should be as men and women! Each period is the entrance on a future hid from view. We revert, therefore, to the thought with which we began these remarks.

All sure hope for the future depends on what we see in the present. What do you see now? Do you see the Ladder that reaches from earth to heaven? Do you see the Way that crosses the chasm from the known to the unknown? Do you find in Jesus Christ the one Being who can give you a hope that will not fail?

It was for this that He came into the world. It was for this that He became a partaker of our human nature, and in that nature lived and suffered. You have had your dream of happiness. Has your dream come true in the joy of finding in Jesus Christ God revealed and heaven opened?

Let me conclude with the closing verses of one of the finest sacred poems in our language, "Saint Paul," by Frederic W. H. Myers—

"This hath He done, and shall we not adore Him?
This shall He do, and can we still despair?
Come, let us quickly fling ourselves before Him,
Cast at His feet the burthen of our care,

Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving,
Glad and regretful, confident and calm,
Then through all life and what is after living
Thrill to the tireless music of a psalm.

Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

# THE LONELINESS OF JESUS.

"Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."—JOHN xvi. 32.

THERE are some occasions when we are specially called to that exercise of mind which we speak of as meditation. When we meditate, we set before our minds well-known truths, and one effect is to feel its impressiveness. We want to have our hearts affected by the greatness or by the pathos of what at other times has been expounded to us or what we have tried to argue out for ourselves. Such an exercise of mind is suitable as we consider that aspect of our Lord's experience to which He refers in so touching a manner when He said to His disciples, "Ye shall leave Me alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

There are *different kinds of loneliness.*

There is outward loneliness, when we have no one to whom to communicate our thoughts. There is the loneliness of being in a crowd composed of people to whom we are unknown. There is the loneliness of the lack of sympathy when those around us have no feeling for our position or the aims of our lives. There is the loneliness of sorrow. The sympathy we receive may to a certain extent be soothing, but it cannot reach the depths of our grief.

Our Lord knew these different kinds of loneliness. We have almost no account of the early period of His life; but we cannot doubt that many a time He visited the solitary spots around Nazareth. At the beginning of His ministry He spent forty days in the wilderness when undergoing temptation; and again and again we are told in the Gospel narrative that He retired to the mountain-top.

Outward loneliness, however, was not a painful element in His life. Many a time He preferred to be alone. Much as He loved His disciples, and full of compassion as He was towards the multitude, He felt the need of withdrawing from their society. He had thoughts that He could not express

to others. He had an inward life that could not be satisfied with human intercourse. He had at times to get away from the face of man. He loved these pauses of silence. He would have enjoyed them more frequently if the people had not sometimes followed Him to His places of retreat.

The loneliness from which He suffered was of a different kind. It arose from being misunderstood. On the first occasion that He publicly addressed His fellow-townsmen, they utterly failed to comprehend His meaning, and became so exasperated that they were ready to cast Him down headlong from the brow of the hill. Doubtless, as His ministry advanced, He gained many listening, admiring hearers, especially amongst those who were conscious of the evil of their lives. It cannot be said, however, that according to the highest standard His ministry was a success. Probably at His death there were not more than five or six hundred who could be called His true followers. The great mass to whom He spoke hung for a time on His lips, but their hearts remained untouched. They wondered, they admired, they exhibited a certain enthusiasm, but it was evanescent. For the most part they

resembled the rocky-ground hearers of the parable; there was no depth in their souls to receive the good seed of the Kingdom. Jesus Himself perceived this. He was not deceived; He was not carried away by popular applause. He saw that the great number before Him were clinging to the things of earth whilst they professed to be interested in the things of heaven.

Did it not create in our Lord's mind a sense of loneliness? Did it not make Him feel that there was a gulf between Him and His hearers? What He saw they did not see. What He delighted in was regarded by them with apathy. What He loved awoke in their souls no genuine devotion. They were eager for His miracles, they were eager at times for His words; but towards Himself they were cold or at the most lukewarm. Oh, what a lonely thing to be constantly speaking to people who gave no real response to His claims, and who had no just appreciation of the value of what He uttered!

We may believe that Jesus often turned for relief to the chosen twelve. He found in them much that He did not find in the thousands whose hunger for the bread of

this life He had appeased. After explaining to the multitude that that miracle was but a symbol of His power to give them the bread that cometh down from heaven, and when many were offended and walked no more with Him, He turned to the twelve and said, "And will ye also go away?" Surely the reply, as spoken through the mouth of Peter, brought comfort to our Lord's lonely heart, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Doubtless a similar comfort He received on other occasions, and yet there is evidence that the comfort was far from being full and satisfying. In the minds of His chosen companions there remained much that was alien to the thoughts of their Master. Especially when He spoke to them of His approaching death He met with misapprehension. Truly as they loved Him, they did not see what was the meaning of His mission to this earth. There was in them much spiritual obtuseness. This appeared not once, but often. It is hard for a man not to be understood by the world outside; but how much more severe a trial it is if those who are nearest to him, the people

with whom he associates from day to day, fail to perceive the chief object of his life! That was one of the trials of our Lord. His daily companions had their eyes closed to what He was looking upon with steadfast gaze. They had the vision of a temporal kingdom; He had constantly before Him the Cross.

In spite of all this, however, it was to Jesus an hour of sorrow when He saw that the time was approaching when these His chosen friends and disciples were to be separated from Him. He speaks of it in terms of plaintive solemnity: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone." He knew what it was that would scatter them. He saw them running from Him like sheep frightened at the first signal of danger. He saw the dismay, the terror, the doubt that were to overtake them. He was to be left alone—alone when having to face His enemies in the Sanhedrim, alone in the Judgment Hall of Pilate, alone when surrounded by the mocking soldiers.

The hour to which He had so often

referred had now come. The moment anticipated had arrived. Critical times in our own history may to some extent help us to imagine His feelings. A great trial has been before us, and we have seen it coming nearer and nearer. It may have been the departure of some loved one. The hope of recovery has fled, and we know that shortly we shall be left alone. When that certainty first rises before us, it seems to us something that we cannot bear. As we are about to enter into the awful solitude, we realise our helplessness. We had often spoken of how sad a thing it must be to be alone, but now we feel it in a way that words cannot express. Or it may be that we are called to undergo some serious operation. The day and the hour have been appointed, and as the time draws near we cannot conceal from ourselves that the issue is doubtful. It may be life healthier and stronger than before, or it may be death. A sense of loneliness comes over us which can be dissipated not even by the love of the friends who surround us or by the skill and gentleness of those who have charge of our case.

Such experiences are akin to what our Lord went through. How well it will be if we can also in some measure understand what He meant when He added, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." We know almost nothing of our Lord's early years, but in the one incident recorded we have a striking illustration of the words before us. He was away from the home at Nazareth; He was in the midst of people who must have been strange to Him—the doctors in the temple, to whom He must have been an object of curiosity rather than of sympathy. Yet He did not feel Himself alone, for He could say, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" So now near the close He has the same unfailing divine companionship. Without this His whole life, and especially its closing scenes, would be deprived of spiritual significance. Jesus knew that in all He did and in all He suffered He had the Father's approval. The Father was with Him when He healed the sick and preached to the people; the Father was with Him when He died on the cross. If in the extremity of pain and

weakness He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the cloud of desertion soon passed, and He expired exclaiming, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

Our Lord here teaches us *the grand source of consolation for solitude.* To most people a lonely life is a trial to which they feel they can never be quite reconciled. To get up day after day without the morning greeting, to sit down to meals having no one to whom to speak, to return after a walk to an empty house, and all that to be gone through for years with no prospect of change, must surely create a sadness of spirit that is in special need of heavenly comfort. Happy are they who, subjected to such severe discipline, realise that an unseen Presence is with them. Great as is the power of the human mind to accommodate itself to circumstances, they know that they could not attain to peace and contentment without the assurance that they are not left to themselves, that there is One near them who by His Spirit communicates the sense of companionship. To Him they express their wants; into His ear they pour their silent com-

plaints, and in His abiding love they confide. They have His Word as a ceaseless treasure of thought, and when its truths are made vivid to their hearts they find that it is not a mere book held in their hands, that it is the living voice of their Father speaking to them of the things that lie deepest to their soul's experience. They are alone, and yet not alone, because the Father is with them.

Is the same kind of consolation possible for those other kinds of loneliness to which we have referred? Can we doubt it if we believe that what our Lord said concerning Himself is true for His people? Jesus suffered, as we have seen, from the loneliness of being misunderstood. We may know little of this, and yet in our smaller spheres we may feel the loneliness of having thoughts which those about us do not share. The things that most interest us do not interest them. The views of truth that impart light to our own lives do nothing to brighten the lives of many with whom we are brought into close contact. If we express what we most value, we meet with no response.

At such times let us find comfort where Jesus found it. Let us throw ourselves

on the fatherly heart of God. Let us be assured that He understands us, that He knows with a perfect knowledge every thought that is in harmony with His mind, and that all such thoughts help in some way or other the development of the kingdom of truth.

So likewise with the loneliness of sorrow. There are cases when a common sorrow binds those together who have been living far apart. The sympathy thus called forth is one of the healing influences of society. When we see others plunged in grief, the voice of passion for the time is stilled. Our pity is stirred, and it may so fill our hearts that other feelings can find no room within us.

Yet it remains true that there are sorrows which intercourse with our fellow-men can do little to alleviate. Suddenly we are overtaken by some terrible change in our lives, and at once we discover that we are alone. Nothing earthly can fill the void. No sympathy, however genuine, can remove the sense of desolation. There is but one source of lasting consolation. It is that of which Jesus spoke. He knew that the awful

solitude into which He was about to enter would have for its support the Father's presence. May that Presence be made real to us in our lonely hours, and we too shall be able to say, "Alone, and yet not alone, because the Father is with me."

# RELIGION PURE AND UNDEFILED.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."—JAMES i. 27.

IT is true of words as of people, that with the course of time some become poorer and others richer. This word "religion," for example, has rather gained than lost since our Bible was translated. At that period it was applied more to the external forms of religion than to its inner spirit. We use it now in a somewhat enlarged sense. When we speak of a man being religious, we do not limit the thought to that part of his life which is engaged in matters of outward worship; we refer to his character generally as imbued with the religious spirit.

However that may be, scholars are agreed that the term used by the apostle in the language in which he wrote has reference

mainly to that side of religion which appears in acts of worship, but he wished to impart to it a deeper meaning. He is alluding to those who imagined that it mattered little what they were if only they paid sufficient attention to religious observances. He applies the rebuke to people who had no conscience about the way in which they used their tongues. Their words might be envious, passionate, or slanderous; but they excused themselves by the reflection that no fault could be found with their scrupulous regard to religious duties. "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain."

It is vain, because, whilst the forms of religion are observed, its spirit is violated. Such unlicensed use of the tongue shows that the heart is deceived. The man is living in a delusion. He takes a part of life for the whole. He does not see that what he calls religion is only its shell wanting the kernel. So the Apostle James proceeds in the words of our text to give an account of wherein lies the essence of true religion. It consists not in forms of worship, but in character. We cannot tell

what a man's religion is by merely seeing him in *church;* we must see him in the ordinary intercourse of life. It is there that God judges him; it is there that God takes an estimate of what his religion is worth.

This, observe, is the first thought of the text—"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father." The expression "before God" simply means, as shown in other passages, "with God"—that is, in God's estimation. There is no religion but that of which God approves. It has regard to His mind, and is never satisfied without a real approach to Himself. What is falsely called religion is impure and defiled, because it is carried on only under the eye of man, and because it seeks only man's approval. Its motives are impure; its desires are defiled. Its aim is to get a reputation for piety, and its desire is to make that reputation in some way a means of temporal advancement.

Pure religion, on the other hand, issues out of a heart that has been clarified from the base motives of self-interest. It is undefiled because its desires go forth to God Himself, the infinite and the Holy One.

It is interesting to observe at the head of the Lake of Geneva the difference in colour between the river that rushes into it and its own clear waters. The river brings from the mountains quantities of sediment that give it a turbid appearance, whilst the lake into which it flows brightly reflects the sun's rays. It is a picture of what we are by nature and of what we may become by grace. As our life flows on, it is dark with the impurities contracted in its course; but when we truly come into contact with God, these impurities begin to disappear. From Villeneuve at the head of the lake go to the town of Geneva at the other end, and what do you see? The river issuing out of it in a very different state from that in which it entered.

There is a like difference wherever religion worthy of the name prevails. How, it may be asked, does so great a change take place? It is because in pure and undefiled religion the Being whom we worship is known as our God and Father. In all true worship there must be reverence; there must be what the Bible calls godly fear, but there is the absence of slavish dread. God is revealed to us in Jesus

Christ as our Father; there is imparted the filial spirit. We learn to cry, "Abba, Father."

It is by this that true worship is distinguished from false. False worship is forced worship. It is forced by fear. True worship is prompted by love. It rises from the heart spontaneously. It is addressed to Him who is our God and Father.

But what is *the influence of such pure and undefiled religion on the character?* This is the main point brought before us in the text. It becomes us to devote to it our earnest attention. The mistake made by those to whom the apostle is here speaking consisted in supposing that the forms of worship were an end in themselves. When they had gone through certain observances, they thought they had done all that was required. Having given a portion of time to what they esteemed their religious duties, they were free to live as they liked. After speaking to God in prayer, they imagined that their tongues were their own, and that He would take no account of how they used them till the next time they were called to repeat devotional exercises. So with their whole life. They claimed for themselves

the intervals between successive acts of divine service. They forgot that there was a divine service with which these intervals ought to be filled. Divine service has no certain days or certain hours. It stretches along the entire life, every day of the week and every hour of the day.

Why is it so? Why may not religion be confined to particular seasons? It is because at all times there is the call to sympathy with sorrow and to separation from sin. Sorrow and sin are the two facts that meet us always and everywhere. Our religion is tested by the way in which we meet them. True religion brings us into a right relation, first, to our neighbours, and secondly, to ourselves.

We have to think of what we owe to our neighbours as expressed in the words "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." The sorrows of the world are infinitely varied. The fatherless and widows are here singled out as examples specially of sorrow in its helplessness calling for aid. These are to be visited. The word of course is not to be limited to paying calls. It means simply to have a regard to, to look after, to be concerned about. This

may be done in different ways. We visit the sorrowing when we think of them, when we remember them in prayer, when we write letters to them, when we relieve them with money if they are in circumstances of want, and when as opportunity occurs we go to their homes.

Such sympathy with the sorrowing belongs to the essence of a religion that is pure and undefiled. It is akin to the nature of Him who is the Source of all true sympathy. "A Father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows is God in His holy habitation." "For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh rewards: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger in giving him food and raiment." And again, in one of the psalms, after lofty views of God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, it is said, "The Lord preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow."

Pity is thus ascribed to God, and we know how in the New Testament that pity is revealed as the love of God for the redemption of the world. To be without pity is

to be unlike God. To have no care for the destitute is to manifest a disposition that is contrary to the heart of God. God cannot be known, He cannot be loved, without something of His infinite pity entering our hearts. We may engage in the rites of religion and remain hard towards our fellow-men, but such hardness must needs pass away when we come into intercourse with God Himself. The river may pour forth its turbid streams into the clear lake, but it does not issue out of that lake as it entered it. It loses its foul elements, and becomes a river pure and undefiled whose waters may give drink to the thirsty.

So it is when we truly worship our God and Father. We learn to live not unto ourselves. Our lives become a source of refreshment to our fellow-men. We sympathise with them in their sorrows, we help them as we can in their times of need, and we grieve over the fallen; we are tender towards the weak, we are compassionate to the suffering, we wish well for those whom the world despises.

Ah! no, let it never be supposed that the love of God is to extinguish love to men.

The most saintly lives have been the most fruitful in deeds of benevolence. A pitiless religion is a worthless religion. The man who is deaf to the appeals of misery has never opened his ears to the call of the compassionate Saviour. He may go through the forms of worship, but he has never come under the influence of that religion which is pure and undefiled. In failing to visit the fatherless and the widow, he shows that never has come from his heart the filial cry, "Abba, Father."

When we thus know God as our Father, we learn to love what He loves and to turn away from what is displeasing to Him. For we have now to observe, in the second place, *what true religion teaches us concerning ourselves.* There is not only sympathy with sorrow; there is separation from sin. This latter is expressed in the last words of our text, "And to keep himself unspotted from the world."

It is striking that the apostle, in speaking of sorrow, directs our thoughts to the sorrows of others; in speaking of sin he leads us to think of our own sins.

We are very apt to reverse this order. When the subject of sorrow is mentioned, we

find it easy to think of our own sorrow; when the subject of sin is mentioned, we find it equally easy to think of the sins of others. The difficult thing is to have a vivid sense of the sympathy that our afflicted neighbours need, and at the same time of the separation from sin that we ourselves need.

Ah! how readily we think of our own sorrows and of our neighbours' sins. It is the glory of pure and undefiled religion to teach us to do the very opposite. It leads us to feel keenly for the distressed, and, instead of indulging in self-pity, to have a tender conscience that reminds us of the spots by which our characters are stained.

We are called to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. The world is full of spots. This must be obvious to the most careless observer. There is the spot of impurity, the spot of avarice, the spot of selfishness, the spot of malice, of envy, of jealousy. The world as shown by these and other spots is deeply stained with evil. It is hard to live in it without getting some of its stains. Who of us can say that he is spotless? Who of us can profess to be spotless in thought, in word, and in action? Our

temptation is to declaim against the world's spots and to forget our own.

It is no light work to which we are called—to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. It is true we cannot keep ourselves. The Apostle James's language must be taken in connection with other parts of Scripture. We are elsewhere told that we are kept by the power through faith unto salvation. Yet there must always be a sense in which it remains true that we are to keep ourselves. It is true in the sense in which St. Jude says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Christian experience shows that there is no contradiction between the two statements.

The special danger against which we have to be on our guard is to cherish the thought that because the world is so full of spots we cannot be expected to aim at spotlessness of character. St. James wants to arouse us to a conviction of our personal responsibility. The structure of the sentence might have led him to say, "And to keep *ourselves* unspotted." His appeal, however, is to the individual conscience, and so he writes, "And to keep *himself* unspotted." It is a matter that belongs to each one of us separately. It will not do to say, "Oh, of

course the world is full of spots, all men are more or less stained, and what better can be expected of me; I must be like the rest and take my chance." No true Christian will speak thus. Every man imbued with the Christian spirit will feel the call addressed to himself. He will try to find out what are the spots that most easily adhere to him. All are not tempted in the same way. One man is peculiarly liable to contract the spot of greed, another the spot of sensual indulgence, another the spot of vanity, another the spot of an excessive love of pleasure. To each of us it is said, Keep yourself, be on the watch, and let not your besetting sin gain the mastery.

It is thus we shall be preserved from hardness towards the suffering and from cynicism towards the sinful. The world's sorrows will awaken our sympathy; the world's sins will lead us to a better knowledge of ourselves. Abounding sorrow will not breed indifference; abounding sin will not breed contentment with evil.

So will it be seen that we possess a religion pure and undefiled before our God and Father. Our religion will overflow from

acts of worship to acts of helpfulness to men, and to resistance to the evil we discover in our own lives. And for all this we shall depend more and more on the grace of Him without whose aid we are helpless in the presence of sorrow, and helpless to overcome the power of sin. Conscious as we are of the many spots that appear in our lives and the many more that are known to God alone, let us betake ourselves to Him whose blood cleanseth from all sin. "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

Christ lived on this earth the spotless One; He died on the cross to make us spotless. "Now unto Him who is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time and now, and for evermore. Amen."

# WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, etc."—ISAIAH lv. 1, 2.

WE may believe that in this appeal there was a message specially adapted to the position of those to whom it was first addressed. How many in the land of captivity must have felt that they were living in a region where there was no water, their minds dissatisfied and their hearts empty. The words fell on their ears with a startling meaning, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." It reminded them of the cry sometimes heard in the sandy desert. A company of travellers lights upon a refreshing spring, and thinking of other companies pursuing their dreary path behind them, they shouted so as to be heard in still clear air a long way off, "Ho, water!"

The message has lost none of its signifi-

cance. Across the ages it has come to us; and though our outward circumstances be so different, it finds a response in the needs of our souls.

Let us think first of all of the invitation. Three times in this first verse is the word "Come." It is a blessed and hopeful word. Behind is the person of the speaker. When it is said "Go," the meaning may be only, Go, and do the best for yourself that you can; go, and amend your ways; go, and turn to the right path. When, on the other hand, it is said "Come," our thoughts are directed to Him who invites us. The word tells us that there is One to whom to come. When in tones of command you say to a child "Go," it may be with reluctance that he obeys you. When in tones of love you say "Come," he is ready to fly into your arms. It is the difference between the Law and the Gospel. The Law says, "Go and do"; the Gospel says, "Come and receive."

Observe, further, *the invitation is addressed to the individual soul.* "Ho, every one that thirsteth." A multitude may be told to go to a certain place, but when one says to us "Come," we may indeed come together to his house; we cannot, however,

come to himself except as individuals. The guests at an entertainment are not satisfied unless the host grasps the hand of each separately. The guests may be many, but each claims a special recognition. Much of the language of our text is borrowed from the illustration of a feast; but it is indicated that it is a feast where every one finds himself treated with a care suited to his own need.

Again, it is *an invitation to the free enjoyment of what is offered.* It is "without money and without price." The captives in Babylon knew well what it was to pay for everything they got. Probably they had to pay more than the just value of the goods. In descriptions of the prisons of Siberia, we are told how those confined for political reasons are charged extravagant sums for the common necessaries of life. Even we ourselves know something of this. Living in a foreign land, we are often expected to give a good deal more for what we buy than is demanded from the native population. The freeness of this invitation would therefore come to the ears of the Jewish captives with a peculiar welcome.

So may it come to us. We live in a

world where money represents all the wants of our mortal existence. Without it nothing can be got for the nourishment of our bodies and the welfare of our lives. We need it constantly, day after day, year after year. It is difficult for us to take in the idea of anything being obtained without it. We are so accustomed to ask, How much to pay? that we can hardly conceive the answer to be, "Nothing." To a certain type of mind it seems, indeed, not to be thought of. They cannot understand anything being of worth that does not cost money or that does not produce it. It is by the money standard that they judge even the higher endowments of mind. Knowledge that does not bring in pounds, shillings, and pence they regard as thrown away. They are slow to believe that any man is willing to do a service for others without some return in cash. So when we refer to the blessings of the gospel being offered without money and without price, they look upon it as an idle way of speaking. It does not represent to their mind any truth of substantial meaning; they think of it as the fanciful idea of a sentimental religion.

It is this state of mind that is reasoned

with in the expostulation that follows, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

The tables are here turned upon the purely mercantile spirit. The man of the world thinks that he gets an adequate return for what he lays out. He believes that the things of sense are worth buying. In this he is not mistaken. The body must be fed, clothed, and sheltered, and that cannot be done without a certain expenditure. The error lies in supposing that the wants of the body and the enjoyments of sense are the whole of life.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" Bread is here taken as the symbol of that which is the nourishment of the higher part of our nature. The bread which we eat nourishes every part of the body; every organ gets its due share. The question is as to whether there is something besides the body that requires to be fed. The people here addressed are expostulated with because they had not considered that question. They were content to be fed physically; they had no longing to be fed spiritually. The bread

for which they spent money was not bread in the higher sense of the term. The word "spent" as given in the margin means weighed, there being an allusion to the ancient custom of weighing so much silver as the price of what was bought. So we read that Abraham, when he bought a piece of ground in which to bury Sarah, "weighed to Ephron the silver." We are reminded that we have to weigh in our minds what we regard as possessing value. In every purchase there is a mental weighing.

What of the mind itself? Can it be weighed? Not, of course, literally; yet in a most real sense we may put the mind in one scale of the balance and all the things that belong to the body in the other. How much shall we have to put in the scale for the body to make it equal to that in which the mind is put?

We may put in everything we possess, and it will not be enough; no, not if we put in all that is represented by the word "bread." The reason is that what the mind or soul requires is something quite different. It is not bread, and all that we spend cannot procure it. "Wherefore

then, says God, do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour or your earnings for that which satisfieth not?"

Our earnings may amount to a large sum, but they cannot buy that which satisfies. They cannot buy delight in knowledge; they cannot buy peace of mind; they cannot buy a contented spirit; they cannot buy love. Much less can they buy spiritual blessings. They cannot buy the sense of forgiveness; they cannot buy communion with God; they cannot buy the presence of Christ in the soul; they cannot buy the gift of the Holy Spirit; they cannot buy any sure hope for the future after death. When we weigh our earnings with such things as these, they come to nothing; they are seen to have no inherent or eternal value.

What, then, is the conclusion at which we are to arrive? It is expressed in the closing words of our text, "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

To hearken diligently is *to give the mind to what is said.* We give the mind when

we choose to listen. That is the original meaning of the word "diligent." It refers to what is chosen. If we do not hear God's voice, it is because we do not choose to hear.

Some may say, "How can I hear God speaking?" Yes, you may hear if you choose to hear.

God speaks in different ways. He speaks, for example, *through dissatisfied longings.* There may be a time in your history when there is forced upon you the conviction concerning all the things you have sought that they are not bread. That is a lesson easily learned about what we put into our mouths. We have no difficulty in recognising the fact that what supports the body cannot satisfy the soul. Nor do we need the voice of God to tell us that the coarse pleasures of sense are insufficient. The moralists of all ages have proclaimed that we cannot reach happiness through the path followed by the voluptuary, the drunkard, or the gambler.

We may be deceived, however, by *more refined sources of gratification.* If we listen to God, we shall hear the words "not bread" spoken over much that in itself is

innocent or even praiseworthy. Social intercourse, politics, the news of the day, the discoveries of science, the inventions of art, books, pictures, music,—they are all good in their own place, and, rightly used, adorn and lend interest to human life. Nothing is to be said against them except this, that they are not the bread of the soul. Our age is full of wonderful things: telephones, gramophones, wireless telegraphy, motor-cars, flying machines, X-rays, radium, theories of evolution, theories about the transmission of light, theories about the ether which is believed to fill all space. We readily get information about such things in our daily papers and in our monthly reviews, and all such information is to be welcomed. It helps us to realise the greatness of God's creation and the far-reaching nature of the mysteries that surround us.

But, after all, we are made to feel that these things, marvellous as they are, cannot fill our hearts, no, nor even what most people are much more taken up with—their social engagements, their round of little pleasures from day to day, their excursions, their journeys, the ancient cities they visit or the landscapes whose beauty captivates

them, the books they read, books of history or books of fiction, books of travel or books of biography. Ah! when a voice within us tells us that we need something more than all that for the food of the soul, then recognise the voice of God. Hearken diligently. It is He who is saying, *Not bread, not bread.* He wishes us to discern that we have deeper wants than can be supplied by what is addressed to the intellect, the imagination, or the taste. And so we may be led on to listen to Him who says, "The Bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world. . . . I am the Bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

We have in our text the Old Testament form of the same great announcement: "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." What we are eating may not in itself be evil, but it is not the highest good of which our nature is capable. God desires that nothing less than what He counts good should be our portion. He would have us to eat what is perfectly

adapted to the nature that was originally made in His image.

"Eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "Fatness" is a Scripture term for what excels. A land that excelled in productiveness was called fat. It produced more than enough; the fruits of its soil were abundant.

The idea is presented in another way in the words of invitation already considered—"Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Milk is an emblem of nourishment, wine of exhilaration. God means that He is prepared to impart not only what will spiritually sustain us, but also what will spiritually gladden us. It is the thought of the apostolic precept, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Do not depend on strong drink for being raised above the cares and sorrows of life, but seek the Holy Spirit to dwell within as a source of refreshment, giving a taste for the higher joys of heavenly communion.

God proposes to impart that which delights the soul. The soul gains delight when it gets a glimpse of the reality of unseen things, when the sense of God's

presence on earth becomes a foretaste of what it will be to enjoy Him for ever. Yes, He promises not only milk, but also wine —the wine of which Jesus spoke to His disciples when He said, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Oh, surely, then, it is worth while to hearken diligently unto Him. His invitations are free, His expostulations are sincere, His promises are faithful. He invites us without money and without price, He expostulates with us as One who desires our eternal welfare, and He promises to bestow upon us the very thing that our soul in its moments of clearest vision ardently craves. May He lead us all by His grace to choose that better part which shall not be taken from us!

# SHEOL.

"If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there."—
PSALM cxxxix. 8.

BY a law of our being we cannot think of ourselves as outside space. Aided by all that we have been told of the vast regions beyond what the eye can see, we are obliged to believe that, were we there, there would stretch before us the limitless ocean of the infinite. That is what the psalmist felt concerning God. He could not present it to his understanding—"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." What he could not understand, however, was made real to his believing convictions. It was for him a necessary truth that the Being who is over all must be in all and through all. With a great wealth of language and of illustration he revels in this truth. He is not content with a bald statement. He gives play to

his imagination, his feelings, his sense of wonder, his sense of awe. He thinks of God as searching him, knowing him in all the details of daily life, when he sits down and when he rises up, observing his mind, so as to watch his half-formed thoughts as they emerge like dim clouds in the distant horizon. God hears every word that he utters; God is around him behind and before, and he feels the touch of the Divine Hand. By no possible effort can he ever get away from God. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" Whither? To the heights above or to the depths below? "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." These last words are startling. Let us pause, and seek to gather from them some profitable reflections.

First of all, let me offer *a needful explanation.* The word "hell" is rendered here and in other passages of the Revised Version by the untranslated term "Sheol." The reason why the Revisers left it untranslated is simply this, that in English we have no word which exactly corresponds to the Hebrew thought. To the Hebrews the

word "Sheol" conveyed the idea of a region vast and dreary into which souls entered at death. Their feelings on the subject were fluctuating. At times they were inclined to regard it as a region where no longer intercourse with God could be maintained, and so in their gloomy moments they asked, as did one of the psalmists, "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy loving-kindness be declared in Sheol?" (or as we have it in our Bibles, in the grave). At other times, in moments of lofty, prophetic inspiration, they looked beyond the darkness of the tomb, and exclaimed, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption."

In the passage before us there is no expression of confidence regarding blessedness in the future. The psalmist's mind seems rather to be occupied with the prevailing view of the period in which he lived, that little in the way of light or joy may be anticipated beyond the present world. His notions of Sheol are vague; and if he yielded

to the thoughts commonly entertained, he might be disposed to regard it as lying in a region where God's presence is unknown. He is so overmastered, however, by the great truth that has taken possession of him, that he at once rejects the idea, and does not hesitate to say, "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there."

The note of exclamation "behold" indicates how wonderful he felt this to be. There was no wonder in saying, "If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there." Heaven was thought of as the very dwelling-place of God. There would be no surprise to find Him there where He reigned supreme. What filled the psalmist's soul with awe was the thought that if he should descend into the abode of the dead, where the light is gone and where it may be feared God is no longer praised, that even there he could make no escape from the all-seeing Eye, that even there he would meet the gaze of the Being from whom nothing visible or invisible is hid.

"If I make my bed in Sheol." The expression "make my bed" is in the original one word, and it simply means to strew any place for lying down. The psalmist's im-

agination carries him into the unseen world, and he sees himself weary with the work and the warfare of the present life. He throws himself on some spot where, wrapped in forgetfulness, he may put away all thought of the conflict through which he has passed. He thinks he may be left to himself; but, lo, he is not alone. Lying there he is startled by discovering that the eye of God is upon him. Ah! he says to himself, I know that amidst the busy scenes of earth I could go nowhere, I could do nothing, I could think no thought, I could speak no word, without the persuasion that all went on under the Eye that sleeps not nor slumbers: but surely here at last I may find escape from that awful look. No; no escape: "If I lie down in Sheol, behold, Thou art there."

We may now endeavour to *apply the psalmist's words to ourselves.* We live in a different age and in a more advanced stage of revealed truth. We cannot put ourselves in exactly the attitude of mind of those who belonged to a darker dispensation. We have got beyond mere conjectures about the future. Taking our stand on our Lord's resurrection, and remembering His utterances with much to be found in the writings

of His apostles, we no longer hesitate to affirm the reality of the world to come. All the more on that account may we be impressed with the prevailing thought of the psalm from which our text is taken. That thought is, that *there is no region visible or invisible from which God is absent.* Whether it be the material world, the human mind, or the state of the dead, we have to recognise that God is there. We cannot exclude God from the universe which He has brought into existence; we cannot exclude Him from minds capable of contemplating that universe; we cannot exclude Him from the region, now concealed, where live the countless millions of those who once dwelt on the earth.

Into that region we are all shortly to enter. Even with the light thrown on its certainty by the coming of Christ, there is much about it that we cannot know. But this we know, that God is there. Here we may succeed in banishing Him from our thoughts. We may live as if there were no God. He may have no place in our desires and our purposes. Our attention may be wholly occupied with the things around us.

That will be no longer possible when we pass from these things. When the engagements of time are over, our minds will be empty. Into these empty minds the conviction will enter with overwhelming force that where we are there God is. We had forgotten Him; we had carried on our lives without reference to His presence. There that will be impossible. There we shall not be able to forget Him; there, whatever mental activity we put forth, the consciousness that He sees all and knows all will overtake us. There, in the expressive language of our text, we shall make our bed.

Did you ever lie awake at night thinking of your sins, thinking of the imperfections of your character, and then remembering that what you are, however hid from men, is known to God? If so, you may in some measure imagine what it will be in the other world to lie down with the Divine Eye fixed upon you.

*Each one there makes his own bed.* We shall find that that is what we have been doing all through life. We were busy, though we did not believe it, strewing a place on which to lie down. Ah! it will be an uneasy bed if the sense of God being

there gives us no comfort. Can we expect anything else, if we derive no comfort from the thought of God's presence here? What right have we to suppose that, if we live godless, prayerless, selfish lives in this world, God's presence is to gladden us the moment we open our eyes in the world to come? The bed on which we shall lie will be the bed we have made for ourselves.

We may exercise our fancy and try to picture the scenes of the future; but for our guidance it is of far more importance to consider *what we are in the present.* The Bible helps us little in the way of speculation. It is before all things a practical book. Its object is to give us truth for present application. We may verify by our experience here what the text suggests concerning hereafter.

We may know something of a Sheol on this earth. The term denoted, as we have said, for the Hebrews a region, dim, dark, dreary, into which the souls of men enter at death. And is there not many a region like to that before death? Is it not the case that many find themselves in a position of loneliness with nothing around to cheer them? And are there not others who by

the unwise pursuit of passing gratification come to the end of all their pleasures, and who fail to derive satisfaction from the things which once filled their lives? And yet, again, are there not those who by plunging into vicious indulgence are engaged in the constant effort to forget what they have become, who carry about with them the uneasy sense that if they allowed their consciences to be awake they would be overtaken by remorseful regrets?

What is needed by such persons? It is the vivid persuasion of the truth that was present to the psalmist's mind. We dare not affirm that that truth realised in the unseen world will never bring hope to those who have failed to realise it on earth. We do not know. The Bible does not tell us with any certainty. Its tone is that of warning. It discourages speculation on matters that lie beyond present experience.

On one point, however, there is no uncertainty. If we now feel as though we had made our bed in Sheol, *the thought that God is there may awaken a hope that nothing else could do.* In this connection how instructive is the close of the psalm. All the psalmist's faculties had been stretched to the utmost in

his endeavour to reach up to the grandeur of the truth that had taken possession of him. He had exerted his imaginative and reasoning powers in setting before his mind what he felt was too high for him to understand. He closes all with the humble petition, "Teach me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Perhaps there is no example in the Bible more impressive of the way in which a truth present to the mind may become invested with living force. The truth to which the mind of the psalmist had been directed when looked at by itself may be felt as a crushing power. In some it may produce a sense of horror, in others a sense of helplessness. It may be compared to the feelings of the prisoner in Roman times who never any moment was free from the soldier to whom he was chained. By night and by day, in the light and in the darkness, there was no possibility of being alone; there was always the presence of another. If we realise what it means to have God near us at all times and in all places, whether in this world or in the world to come, the thought may over-

whelm us, and we may feel like to that Roman prisoner doomed to be chained to an unwelcome companionship.

How was the psalmist delivered from any such feeling? It was by turning the truth into prayer. He had begun his meditations by saying, "O Lord, *Thou hast searched me*, and *known me*." He ends with the petition, "*Search me*, O God, and *know my heart*." He not only assents to the truth; he joyfully accepts it, and asks God to do the very thing he had just said God was doing.

By prayer he rises into the region of liberty, and the truth instead of enslaving him imparts freedom. It is like the atmosphere which weighs upon our bodies, and which, unless counteracted by the force of life, would crush us. We do not feel the weight of air; it is by breathing it that life is supported. Expose a dead body to the air, and in a short time it is dissolved by the very element which supplies energy to a living body.

So it is with such a truth as that now before us. Assent to that truth as simply inevitable, and it will take all hope out of us; accept it with gladness, let it in prayer be the breath of our soul, and we shall

rejoice in spiritual liberty. It will not be a weight to crush us; it will be an atmosphere to quicken us. If we can truly offer the petition, "And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," we shall find that He who looks is He who leads. The looking God is the leading God, and we shall not shrink from that look as we walk in the way everlasting; yea, we shall not be afraid to say, "If I make my bed in Sheol, Thou art there."

# THE CLOTHED STATE.

"For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."—2 Cor. v. 4.

It cannot be expected that all should be able to use language like this. There are many who have never felt the burden of the earthly tabernacle. Blessed with health and placed in circumstances that make the present life desirable, they hardly know what it is to groan. On the lips of the young, the strong, and the happy, the words before us would sound unreal, unnatural.

When, however, we think of the great multitude of sufferers that the world contains, and when we remember that there is no one who may not be suddenly reduced to a state of weakness and of pain, we realise that what St. Paul expressed about himself and a large number of his fellow-Christians is still appropriate, even amidst all the

alleviations made available by our more advanced civilisation. For, of course, we gratefully admit that much has been done in these modern times for the relief of the bodily ills to which we are subject. Nor can we forget that in many respects the present life has to us become more interesting. Slavery has been abolished, political liberty has been gained, education has become almost universal, the general intelligence of most communities has been raised, and the means of rapid travelling and the circulation of news have been brought about in ways that to past ages would seem little short of miraculous. Dwelling on these tokens of progress, some may regard much of the Bible language on human life as no longer applicable. It may seem an anachronism to speak of groaning under the burdens of this present life.

Yet, after all, is it the case that the groanings of humanity have ceased? Is it true that all men and women can trip along life's pathway with light step? Is it not rather the case that in some respects our modern life has become more complex? May we not say that the enormous increase of earth's population has produced conditions of com-

petition that render the struggle of life harder than ever it was? At the present hour are there not millions groaning under burdens that they feel too heavy to bear? How many there are who could find no words more suitable in which to express their feelings than those uttered about two thousand years ago, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." And may we not believe that there are many who would like to add, "Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life"?

How true it is that the Bible is a book for all ages of the world's history! Its allusions and illustrations may be often drawn from things that are temporary, but its fundamental truths are eternal. Nothing can alter the fact that we are living in frail tabernacles, and that we need the hope of an enduring home. Let us not refuse to think of these facts, but seek in them renewed instruction and consolation.

"For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." *The great mystery of our being is here recognised.* We and our bodies are separate; yet they are so knit together that what affects one

affects the other. We are conscious that our real personality does not belong to the material frame which we inhabit, and yet there is no weakness or pain that we do not feel. The body without the soul could feel nothing. Sensation and perception through the action of the nervous system pass to the thinking mind. It is what we can never explain; but we know that our bodies are not ourselves. However close may be the relationship, we are persuaded that we are only *in* this tabernacle, that *it* is something which *we* are not.

Hence arises *the sense of bodily limitations*. Our minds travel beyond our bodies. By memory and imagination we call up scenes far distant. It is this sense of limitation that has quickened man's endeavours to go rapidly through space. We would wish to have bodies as free and unfettered as our minds. We would like to be able to transfer ourselves with lightning speed to wherever our thoughts travel. The conquest of the air now going on, and which seems destined to reach a marvellous perfection, is a proof of this. Ever since the fabled days of Icarus there has been a longing for flight towards the skies. It

indicates that we want to have bodies that will no longer impede us in our desire to move in an element higher than that of the solid earth or the changing sea.

In this respect we differ from the animals around us. Each species is content to live in the sphere where it has been placed. We do not observe in them any struggle to rise above the conditions of their lot. It is man who has within him a soul that is restless and aspiring. He realises his confinement, and longs for conditions of outward life corresponding to his capacities of thought. It is because he *thinks* that he knows his body is not himself. His true self has the intimation that he is destined for something nobler than his present earthly existence. He feels the burden of the tabernacle within which he dwells. It is a burden to have to keep that tabernacle in constant repair. Care is needed every day. The body must be fed, clothed, and sheltered. Not a day can pass without attention to its wants. For the supply of these wants toil must be endured. The old curse remains, "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread."

Besides all that, there are the numberless

forms of disease to which the body is liable. I suppose it may be said that there are comparatively few who are in perfect health. Almost every one has some kind of ailment. This is indicated by our daily form of salutation. Instinctively we ask one another how we are. We know so well by experience that absolute freedom from complaint cannot long be maintained.

No wonder, then, that the apostle speaks of "groaning." As already remarked, the word had for him, and for most of the Christians of those days, a peculiar significance. He bore on his body what he calls the marks of the Lord Jesus. Stripes and imprisonment had left their tokens on a frame wellnigh worn out with incessant work. On his lips it was no meaningless phrase to say that in this tabernacle he groaned, being burdened.

We happily know nothing of this kind of burden. We are enjoying the freedom gained through the sufferings of the martyrs of other days. In comparison to theirs our groaning is but a sighing. Yet the sigh that we breathe forth often springs from causes that are real enough. It is not a sentimental sigh; it is the sigh of genuine sym-

pathy with those who suffer more than we have ever done. We think of the many living in poverty and in pain, and we cannot but in some measure feel the pressure of their burdens. Oh, surely there is no Christian heart that does not, when contemplating the sorrows of humanity, respond to the truth of the words, "For we indeed that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." The words may be appreciated by all, whether Christians or not. It does not need spiritual enlightenment to perceive that they express facts obvious to every observer.

It is not so with the words that follow—"Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." Here we are in a region that demands Christian faith. The first half of our text may be understood by all who pay any attention to what is going on in the world; the second half can be understood only by those possessed of spiritual desire.

It is the *desire for what is called the spiritual body*. Many of the ancient heathen thinkers, feeling the ills of the present life,

expressed the wish for a disembodied state. Their wish was simply for deliverance from the encumbrance of a frame that weighed upon them. There are some in our day who have the same feeling. All they want is to get out of the miseries of their lot. They would be content to go through death, if thereby their unhappiness might come to an end.

It is of something different, however, that our text speaks. The apostle says that he does not wish for merely the unclothed or disembodied state. He has never known his soul except in union with the body, and to him it is something repulsive to think of passing into the other world an unclothed, naked spirit. He wishes to go "clothed upon," as he expresses it. The word occurs only in this passage, but its meaning is not doubtful. It is an illustration borrowed from what a labourer does when, going abroad, he puts on a garment over the clothes he had on when at work. When Peter in the boat heard from John that it was Jesus who spoke to them from the shore, we are told that he girt his fisher's coat unto him, for he was naked—that is,

he had on him only the clothes in which he was accustomed to fish. The fisher's coat was put on when he left the boat.

So it is with us. We do the work of life clothed with the body. When at death we leave the body, our souls would be entirely naked unless another body were provided. It is with this other body that we are to be clothed upon.

What we are to think of this other body it is not easy to say. Perhaps the only helpful view we can take of it at present is to regard it as *consisting of the memories of our Christian experience.* In this light it may be thought of as being gradually formed now. As our faith advances we are gathering a store of Christian thought and affections which cling to us, and which we shall carry with us into the other world. We shall go into the unseen, not as naked souls, but as souls carrying with us the faith, the love, the hope that have been exercised in fellowship with Christ. Death is not to us an escape from misery; it secures the continuation and the expansion of what has given deepest joy upon earth. Doubtless much more than this is meant by the spiritual body; but this at present we can

understand, that it will perpetuate the blessedness known in some measure even here.

A naked soul at death is a soul that carries nothing from earth to be enjoyed hereafter. A clothed soul is a soul that takes with it what will enrich and adorn it for ever. It is, to use the apostle's expression in the beginning of the chapter, clothed upon with the house from heaven. It began to live in that house from heaven when on earth, and now, leaving earth, it finds itself, as it were, clothed upon with the house; the house enfolds it, encircles it, as the sphere within which its spiritual energies are henceforth to be displayed.

And what is the result? It is expressed in the suggestive words — "that mortality might be swallowed up of life," or, as put in the Revised Version, "that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life." This is indeed a remarkable utterance. We speak of the jaws of death, we speak of the mouth of the grave, we speak of the generations of men being swallowed up of death. Death is likened to a devouring monster, ready at any moment to seize on its prey.

Here we have the reversal of all such

thoughts. It is not death, it is life which is spoken of as swallowing up what is mortal. Life is compared to a vast element into which at death we are plunged, and in which all that is mortal is absorbed or lost.

It is one of the most profound views of immortality presented in the New Testament. We can only give some idea of what it means by taking it in connection with the great Old Testament saying, "For with Thee is the fountain of life." When as believers in Christ we pass from earth, we enter into a region where, in communion with Him who is the Fountain of life, our souls clothed with the memories and experiences of our present spiritual life, all that is mortal is swallowed up in the ocean of God's immediate presence. It is not death which swallows up life; it is life which swallows up death.

Take the panting dying fish lying on the shore, and plunge it again into its native element, and death for it is swallowed up in life. What to us would be death is life to it. So it is with the dying Christian. To the eye of some it would seem that he is about to be swallowed up in death.

It is not so, however. What takes place is the opposite of that. He passes into a life that swallows up death. The body which he leaves behind crumbles into dust, and no more will he inhabit a tabernacle of flesh and blood. He gets another body which dies no more. He enters a region where death is unknown. The infinite life of God so surrounds him, so penetrates his soul, that everything mortal comes to an end; there remains only the immortal. What was sown a natural body is raised a spiritual body. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

From all this let us gather hope and encouragement. To meet us the messengers of death come long before the actual dissolution of our mortal bodies. Our grey hairs, our decaying strength tell us plainly that the day is approaching when the tabernacle of flesh shall cease to clothe us. We do not wish to be unclothed; no,

it would be unnatural if we did. We wish to be clothed with a body that shall be proof against the inroads of disease and decay. That body we shall obtain when what is mortal is swallowed up of life.

Let us think of death as a birth into the fulness of life. As the new-born child comes into contact with the living being ready to welcome it, so may we hope to come into contact with the living and the loving who have gone before us. On earth we are constantly meeting with the tokens of death; there it will be only life that shall surround us. Then there will be nothing to remind us of death, no one to speak of death. It will be life, life for evermore.

To whom are we indebted for such a hope, such a prospect? To our risen Lord. His resurrection gives us the assurance that we are destined to a fulness of life such as we have never known on earth.

At this season of the year we are reminded how the earth revives, and with its fresh green tells us how life springs out of death. It is an emblem of the grand fact of redemption that our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead as the first-fruits

of them that shall rise to a life of immortal blessedness. Oh, let not the burdens of our tabernacles of flesh hinder us from rejoicing in Him through whose death and resurrection we cherish the conviction that what is mortal shall be swallowed up of life. It is not a dead Christ whom we worship. He is our living Lord, and because He lives we shall live also.

"Blessed be the everlasting God,
The Father of our Lord;
Be His abounding mercy praised,
His majesty adored.
When from the dead He raised His Son,
And called Him to the sky,
He gave our souls a lively hope
That they should never die.

Saints by the power of God are kept
Till the salvation come:
We walk by faith as strangers here;
But Christ shall call us home."

## THE PERFECT GIFT.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—JAMES i. 17.

THE apostle has been speaking of the things that come from below—temptation, lust, sin, death. In solemn words of affectionate appeal he urges upon his readers to make no mistake: "Do not err, my beloved brethren." Do not for a moment suppose that such things as these can have a heavenly origin. On the contrary, be assured that what comes from above is very different. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Let us, then, think of the *divine gifts*, and *of Him* from whom they come.

St. James uses two terms derived from the same word, but expressing different shades of meaning. ("Every good gift" is literally

"every good giving." The thought is that not only is the gift good, but the manner of giving is good.

The Roman writer Pliny in one of his interesting letters tells his correspondent that he had been asked to praise a certain man for what he had done in giving money to some people. Pliny says that he does praise him, but that he would do so with more confidence if he knew precisely the motives that had prompted such liberality. He then goes on to enlarge on the various ways in which people bestow their gifts. He observes that some are liberal only to the rich from whom they expect perhaps something better in return. Others never give except when what they do can be seen, showing that it is ostentation rather than benevolence which prompts them. Others when they give to one object take care to withdraw from some other object that had claimed their support, so that their liberality, whatever it appears, may never go beyond certain limits.

I leave you to judge whether such remarks are not as applicable now as they were in the Roman world at the beginning of the second century. At any rate, they may be

used to illustrate the point before us. The true value of a gift depends on *the motive* of the giver. Is it from love or from regard to one's own interests? The gift in itself may be precious, but the thought that underlies it may be worthless.

Now, the text asserts that *the giving from above is always good.* Goodness is what characterises it. Nothing that is bad is behind it—no bad feelings of grudging, no bad calculation of selfish aims. These bad elements come from below. They are the offspring of a mind that has never risen to what is noble and generous. What is from above is pure, genuine, utterly sincere. It is untouched by sordid motives. Goodness is its native air.

This is what we understand by a good man—a man who is true, whose word can be depended on, who does what he says, and who says nothing he does not mean. It is that which in its highest form we attribute to God. He dwelleth above all the littleness of earth. He is absolutely free of the mixed motives which sometimes appear in even the best men. He is incapable of giving without love. He is incapable of professing to give whilst with-

holding the desire to help. He is infinitely above the meanness of making a show of liberality. It was this that the writers of the Bible felt so deeply when they spoke of God as "good." The Psalms are full of the thought. "Thou art good and doest good." "The Lord is good to all."

We may now turn to the other term which St. James uses when he speaks of "every perfect gift." The idea prominent here is not the manner of giving, but simply the thing given. In the Revised Version it is rendered "boon," indicating that we are to think of this gift as the great blessing bestowed upon man. It is said to be "perfect." It is so as being perfectly adapted to our need.

*This perfect gift is from above.* We are reminded of the testimony borne by John the Baptist to our Lord's divine origin, "He that cometh from above is above all"; and of what our Lord said to the Jews concerning Himself, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world."

Christ did not spring from earth. His Person cannot be explained by His environment. He was not the product of His age.

He is not to be regarded as having simply reached the highest point of human endeavour. Coming from above, He is above all. He is above all our thoughts, all our efforts, all our attainments. He did what none of us can ever do, because He was what none of us can ever be. He did not ascend from earth; He came down from heaven.

He is the perfect boon, the perfect blessing to our lost world. He came for our redemption. He came to deliver us from the guilt of sin, and to restore us to the blessing of reconciliation with God. In this respect His work was perfect. He could say on the cross, "It is finished": or in the words which He addressed to the Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."

Whatever else we receive can never be rightly enjoyed but through Him who is God's perfect gift to man. The blessings of life, of health, of prosperity, of human love, all are magnified a thousandfold when, as in the thanksgivings which so often occur in the letters of the apostles, they are accepted through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If we want to know what is

meant by every perfect gift from above, we must first of all yield our hearts to Him who, being from above, is above all. He is above all other gifts — the best, the highest, the most enduring. It is in accepting Him that we part company with the things that are below. These beset our path and drag us down to their low level. It is Christ who raises us, exalts us, purifies us, and enables us to set our affections on the things that are above. Oh, let us value this supreme, this perfect gift! Let us say from the bottom of our hearts, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

*But how*, it may be asked, *can we rightly estimate so great a boon?* We have the answer in the same chapter from which we have quoted the Baptist's testimony. You remember the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," or from above. Christ is appreciated by those who possess a life in harmony with His own. He came from above to bestow upon us a life that is above. That life does not spring from our own natural dispositions. It is not the growth of education. Education may be the means of awakening it, and certainly education has much to do in the way of

fostering its habits. All who possess it, however, are conscious that it has come to them as a divine gift. They believe that it has come to them from above through the presence in their souls of God's Spirit. Born from above, they seek more and more to be raised above the influences that come from below.

When temptation assails them, when evil desires entice them, when sin presses hard upon them, they betake themselves to Him who is above all. Their cry is, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." They look upwards, and they see in the clefts of that Rock a sure refuge. He rescues them by raising them. They overcome the world by getting above it. As water rises to its own level, so the new life rises to Him from whom it is derived. This is God's perfect way of leading souls through the dangers of their tempted course. He shows them Himself, and anew there is stirred within them the longing to be hid in Him. Yes, they say, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

And so we may now proceed to think more specially of Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. All careful

readers of St. James's Epistle must be struck with the many original expressions which it contains. We have one of the most memorable in the words before us—"the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." As we all know, light is used in Scripture, especially in the writings of St. John, as an emblem of what God is—"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." What is peculiar to our text is that He is called "the Father of lights." We may take the expression in its widest application as denoting all kinds of light. There is material light, intellectual light, moral light, and spiritual light.

1. *Material light* is that element of nature so familiar, but which never ceases to be an object of wonder. Our men of science have much to say about it. They analyse it, they show the different colours of which each ray is composed, they tell us of the millions of miles it travels through space, and how from the most distant stars it arrives at our earth by means of the all-surrounding ether. Such information, valuable as it is, does not, however, satisfy our minds. We are filled with

curiosity about the origin of light. How did it spring into existence? At the last resort we come back to the words of the Old Book, "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." He is the Father of light. It owes its origin to the Being who called it forth. He gave it to meet the eyes that were afterwards to be created. We know nothing in the natural world more perfect. We cannot conceive anything more perfect. The great poets of the world, such as Dante and Milton, when they want to picture the perfect state hereafter, can do little more than expend their genius in rapt effusions on the glory of the light of heaven.

2. And so there is what we call *intellectual light*. It is the light of the mind. We see truth that cannot be contradicted. The truths of number are of this kind. We cannot contradict the statement that two and two make four. So there are what are termed necessary truths that must be accepted whenever the words in which they are expressed are understood, as, for example, when we say that every effect must have a cause.

All truth, however, is not of that neces-

sary kind. There is what is called probable truth. It rests on evidence. The light of the mind enables us to perceive the evidence, and to see that in some cases it amounts to certainty. The truths of history, for example, leave no room for doubt. The evidence is so clear that it produces conviction. God has thus implanted in the human mind the light of knowledge. He is the Father, the Parent of this intellectual light without which we should be shut up for ever in mental darkness.

3. And then, further, there is *moral light.* It is that which enables us to distinguish between right and wrong. We cannot help observing that there is a meaning in the word "ought." We do not reason about it. We have the inward conviction that there are certain things we ought to do and certain other things we ought to avoid doing. Whence comes this moral light? It comes from God. He is the Father of it. He has made us to be moral creatures. He has placed in our souls the light of law. He has endowed us with the wonderful faculty of conscience. We may have to be educated as to how we are to apply the distinction between right and wrong; but

such education would be impossible unless we had within us the capacity to perceive the distinction. It is only moral beings who can be morally educated. Surely we are to recognise this amongst the gifts bestowed upon us by the Father of lights, that we can recognise what we ought to be.

4 Then, highest and best of all, there is *spiritual light*. There is in every man, dim it may be, and often quenched, a certain light that points to God and the unseen. It is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Where did we get our idea of God and of a region beyond that which meets our eyes? We receive it from God Himself. He is the Father, the Author, of this light that bears testimony to His presence. Without it religion would be reduced to the meaningless performance of certain rites, or rather we should say, there would be no religion at all. The religions of the world, crude and erroneous as in many respects they are, have a true thought to begin with. Individual men may persuade themselves that they can do without God, but certainly the history of the race shows man's need of God. In every nation there are those who seek the Lord,

if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us. The light may be obscure, but it is sufficient to show that man was made for God.

Of these varied lights to which we thus briefly referred, God is said to be the Father. It is an unusual expression, not occurring elsewhere in Scripture. It impresses upon us the thought that the power whence all light comes is a *personal Being*. There could be no light in nature around us, and no light in our own minds, if it had not pleased the living, the personal God to communicate what enables us to see the things outside of us, and to see with an inner eye the things that belong to us as intelligent, moral, spiritual creatures.

Now, what confidence have we that the light which comes from God will not fail us? It rests on the truth expressed in our text that He who is the Father of lights is without variableness or shadow of turning.

Our world is so arranged that for some hours during every twenty-four it falls into darkness. The light is not continuous; it varies with the seasons, and with the alternation of day and night. It is an

arrangement suited to our need. We are so constituted that perpetual work, or perpetual conscious enjoyment, is beyond our powers. Our eyes and our minds require seasons of repose. Uninterrupted light would be injurious alike to body and mind.

God is not subject to these changes. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. In Him there is no variableness. He does not pass from one condition to another. In Him there is no shadow of turning, or as given in the Revised Version, "Neither shadow that is cast by turning."

We all know why it is dark during the night. The sun is then shining as brightly as during the day. It is because of the shadow that is cast of the turning of the earth. The sun never turns a dark side. It is we who turn from the sun, and so the shades of evening come over us. God never turns; He never casts a shadow. When we are in moral or spiritual darkness, it is because we have turned from Him. It is our turning that casts the shadow. God is the shadeless One; in Him is no darkness at all. If we wish the light, it is we who must turn towards Him. We have to pray with the Old

Testament Church, "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine." Ah! when He turns us, then do we see that His face is still bright with the light of love.

# DEATH AS AN EXODUS.

"And spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."—LUKE ix. 31.

"Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance."—2 PETER i. 15.

MOSES and Elias conversed with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration on the subject of His death. Peter long years afterwards wrote calmly about his own death as an event soon to take place. There is something interesting and suggestive when we bring the two facts together. It is all the more striking when we note the further fact that the words used for death is in both passages the same.

It is the word "exodus," and with that special meaning it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Peter proceeds to give some account of what he and his fellow-disciples had seen and heard on the mount, and it is certainly remarkable that he should refer to the approaching end of

his life with an expression that recalls the story as given by the evangelist Luke. We do not know whether he had Luke's Gospel before him; but, consciously or unconsciously, he was led to the use of a term that connects his description with that of the evangelist. In any case, I think, we may find instruction in taking this view of death as applied first to our Lord and then to the Christian believer. The word "exodus" means simply "*of*" or "*from* the way," and in its more definite sense it refers to *going with a purpose from one place to another.*

That was its significance as applied to the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. They left Egypt with the object of going to Canaan. It was all planned beforehand. It would not have been an exodus had they gone without foresight or arrangement.

There is also implied in the term the idea of finality. It is not an exodus when you leave your country for a time with the intention of returning. When Columbus sailed from the shores of Italy in search of a new continent, it was not for him an exodus, for his hope was to return with the news of his discovery. It was different

when the Pilgrim Fathers left the shores of England. They went to the New World to settle there for life. It was for them in the true sense of the term an exodus.

Now, then, in this light let us reverently think of our Lord's death. No one can read the Gospel narrative without being impressed by the way in which Jesus so often spoke of the certainty of His death. It did not come upon Him unawares. He knew how He was to die. The cross was always before Him. Death was to Him an exodus, *because ere it came it was present to His thoughts.* We may thus say that His exodus began with His public ministry. We do not know what were His thoughts before then. Only we may believe that the words which He uttered at twelve years of age gave meaning to all He said and did during the period of His early manhood. He was always engaged about His Father's business. When He entered on the work of teaching, there came to Him the conviction that that work was to have as its issue the laying down of His life for the redemption of men. He realised that He was on the way to the voluntary sacrifice of Himself on the cross.

His life was thus a going forth to death. He said He had a baptism to be baptized with which He longed to accomplish. As the time drew near, it is said that He set His face steadfastly towards Jerusalem. In the eagerness of His love He was ready to go through that for which He had come into the world. In Gethsemane His human spirit quailed before the tremendous task He had undertaken, but in faith and submission He yielded Himself to the Father's will.

*On the cross His exodus was finished.* Apparently defeated, it was then that He triumphed. His feelings were expressed in the significant words, "It is finished." The thought of finality was present to His mind. He had indeed told His disciples that He would see them again. He was to return to earth as the risen Saviour. He knew, however, that He would not come back to earth to suffer and to die. That was now all past. Death to Him was truly an exodus. It was final separation from the limited life which for thirty-three years He had lived on earth. No longer was His spirit to be vexed by the narrow and mistaken views of His disciples, no longer

was He to be harassed by the opposition of His enemies, no longer was He to be surrounded by crowds that had no real sympathy with His aims. The solitudes of the wilderness and of the mountains were no more to witness to His sense of loneliness. He was now to pass into the larger life of His glorified state. He spoke from experience when, on the evening of the resurrection, He said to the two on the way to Emmaus, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" Yes, surely it was an exodus for Him to pass from suffering into glory. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Such a view of His death was, we may see, peculiarly appropriate to be the subject of converse on the Mount of Transfiguration. For a brief moment Jesus was then raised above the sorrows and troubles of earth. It was a foretaste of glory. It was a glimpse of what was to follow. Death was presented to His mind as an exodus—a deliverance from the limited life of flesh

and blood, and an entrance into the life of the spiritual body.

Are we to say that more was suggested? We are here to remember the indications given in the Gospel narrative of the success of our Lord's ministry as being only partial. We might have expected that a ministry so wonderful should be accompanied with tokens of widespread results. It was not so, however. St. Paul speaks of at the most five hundred disciples as witnesses of the Lord's resurrection. The miracles and discourses of Jesus made an impression on the multitude, but to a large extent it was an impression that passed away. This was not for lack of urgency in the invitations of Jesus. On one occasion He stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." And to show how full of meaning was such an appeal, He added, "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Were there many who at the time understood the words or found the illustration of them in their own experience? The reason why it was not so is given by the

evangelist in the remarkable explanatory statement: "But spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

We may say that the explanation only raises other difficulties. Certainly we must confess that we here touch on a portion of revealed truth that passes our comprehension. The fact, however, is undisputed that the real success of the gospel did not begin till after our Lord had ascended into heaven. It was then that, according to His promise, the Spirit was poured forth on the souls of men, and multitudes acknowledged in Jesus Christ their Saviour.

Was it not to this He looked forward when He told the disciples that His absence in body would have for its compensation the presence of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth? Are we not then warranted in saying that death for Him was an exodus, an entrance into that higher sphere where He was to become the grand Source of blessing to the souls of men? The glory into which He passed was the glory of flooding human hearts with divine love, the

glory of raising human lives into a divine fellowship. It was for Him a blessed exodus that now His words were to find a response in believing minds, and that the sufferings which He endured were to be known as the one perfect atonement for the sins of all who trusted in Him. He saw the millions in every clime to whom His name would become dear. In the words of ancient prophecy, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

We may now turn for a few moments to *look at this view of death as applied to the Christian believer.* The Apostle Peter, as we have remarked, made use of the same term in referring to his approaching departure. In thinking of his death as an exodus, did he not associate himself with his Lord? Did he not feel that if death was to his Master an exodus, so in a sense was it to be to him? His memory was busy with the whole scene of the Transfiguration, and doubtless he specially remembered what he then said when he spake about making three tabernacles, and now he thus writes, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our

Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." He had the conviction that the time and the manner of his departure had been arranged by Him of whose glory he had been a witness, and he was assured that for him too it would be a departure from a lower to a higher state of being.

In one respect our experience differs from that of Peter's. The Lord has not shown to us the particular way in which we are to meet death. In this matter we have no greater privilege than the rest of mankind. All men know that they have to die, but none of us know when or how the event is to take place. Christian faith, however, may be expected to enable us to anticipate our end in a way not possible to those to whom this life is their all.

The common maxim of the world is, Enjoy yourself as much as you can, and do not think of death till it comes. One of the best-known Roman poets is never weary of repeating the maxim in various forms of expression, and we all remember how the Apostle Paul quotes it in his great argument on the resurrection: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." As Christian believers we refuse to adopt

that pagan view of death. We regard it as having a deeper meaning than simple submission to the law of mortality. We look upon it as our exodus from the lower life of earth to the higher life of heaven.

It is this which teaches us the value of the present life. We do not think of it as merely affording an opportunity for enjoying ourselves. Grateful for such joys as it brings, we have something of the mind of the apostle as exhibited in the passage before us. He was anticipating the end as not far off, but meanwhile he shows anxiety to use well for the good of others the time that remains. It is a poor thing to spend one's days only in personal gratification, or, as in the case of some unhappy persons, in doing nothing but wish they were over.

The lower life of earth is not to be considered as not worth the living. When we regard it as leading on to our exodus, we at once feel how precious it must be. An exodus implies that we go forth to another scene with a certain character, with certain desires and dispositions fitting us for the new sphere on which we are about to enter.

When the children of Israel made their exodus out of Egypt, they carried with them into the wilderness the baser habits of thought they had acquired in the land of bondage. The consequence was that to a large extent they failed to enter on the possession designed for them. As the result of their unbelief and their murmuring spirit, most of them never reached the promised land. They did not recognise the spiritual significance of their exodus. So will it be with us if we use the word as a more delicate expression for death or fail to realise what it means. In the Christian sense it means an eternal entrance into a region of holy love.

Let us understand the meaning of our words. Let us not say that death is to be our exodus, unless in this present life we are seeking by God's grace to cultivate those dispositions of soul that shall fit us for joining the great company who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. We must be in believing sympathy with Him, our Lord and Saviour, in His exodus when, having overcome the sharpness of death, He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

# REMEMBRANCE OF THE PRECEPTS.

"I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou hast quickened me."—PSALM cxix. 93.

How many words are uttered on the earth every day! What volumes of speech in the different languages of the world's population! For the most part these words pass into oblivion. Listened to for the moment, they are then forgotten for ever. Yet there remains a large stock of memorable sayings. I remember reading in my student days a small Latin book of Roman history that gave a brief narrative of events with a record of the sayings of leading statesmen and generals from Romulus to Cæsar Augustus. The design was to illustrate the characters of the men who had helped to shape the history of the Roman people. The idea was a good one; and if it could be carried out on a larger scale so as to

comprehend the characteristic remarks of all the men of thought and of action whose names are preserved on the pages of history, we might know better than we do the kind of influence exerted by those who did so much for their own generation and for the generations that followed. The best biographies are those that give us insight into a man's character. They not merely tell us the story of his doings; but, recalling the things he uttered in casual moments, they reveal something of his motives and aims. In the English language there is at least one biography of supreme excellence in this respect, and accordingly it is read and quoted more than any other book of the same kind. Few nowadays care to read the writings of Dr. Johnson, but it may be safely said that his 'Life' will never lose its interest. Its interest lies in this, that it shows the man himself. We see him in all his varied moods, and we can imagine that we hear him talking.

It is this which in the highest sense of the term gives interest to the Bible. The Bible is not a theological treatise; it is not a series of essays on the subject of religion. It is a record of the divine sayings. These

sayings are not general utterances. They were given forth at various times and in divers manners. So, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, "God spake unto the fathers by the prophets."

This was the idea of the writer of the psalm from which our text is taken. He uses different expressions — statutes, judgments, testimonies, precepts, — but the thought which underlies them all is, that God has spoken to man. He feels that he is dealing with the Being who has expressed His mind. This expression of the mind of God is something that the psalmist says he cannot forget. It has stamped itself on his memory in such a way that he finds it not out of place to enlarge on the impression it produced in this long psalm of 176 verses. It is easy to forget an elaborate discourse, but what is directly spoken from one mind to another takes a far firmer hold. If you read the Bible as intended to show what God is saying, you will return to it again and again with renewed interest.

This is the peculiar charm of the Gospel narrative. Jesus wrote nothing; He left no book behind Him. He trusted to the memory of His hearers. *He so spoke that*

*they could not forget what He said.* During the early years of the Christian Church there were no Gospels and no Epistles. The first Christians depended on what they themselves had heard, and on the reports of those who went about repeating the Lord's sayings. In course of time these were gathered together and written down for the instruction and delight of future ages. The use of the Gospels is to place us as far as that can be done in the position of our Lord's hearers. We listen to what Jesus said.

The term used in our text is specially appropriate to this idea. The word "precept" comes from what means to visit, and it often refers to giving one the charge of something to be kept. God is represented as having visited the human family, and He says, Here is what I want you to keep for Me; I charge you to remember and to put it in practice. It is My precept; it is the expression of My mind; do not forget it.

The word may be extended to all that God has made known. In a wide and comprehensive sense the whole record of revealed truth may be spoken of as God's precept. It is that which He has committed to us; it is the treasure which He has placed

within our reach. It may be looked at from different points of view. In one aspect it refers to what God is, in another to what He has done, in another to what He has promised to do, and in another to what He requires of us.

The grand fact is that God has visited us. He has not left us to ourselves. This is the thought which fills the psalmist's mind with joy. With unwearied persistence he repeats under varying expressions his glad persuasion that he may speak his mind to God because God has spoken His mind to him. We need not then wonder that he can say, "I will never forget Thy precepts." It is the expression of a moral resolve.

There are two kinds of memory. There is what may be called natural memory, and there is moral memory. We have in our minds many things that we cannot forget. The places we have often visited, the people we have often met, the books we have often read, — these become the furniture of the mind which are not displaced, except, it may be, in times of illness or through the infirmities of extreme old age.

That is true concerning much of the Bible.

There are parts of the Bible that few of us can ever forget. Many of the psalms, some chapters of the prophets such as the 53rd and 55th of Isaiah, and in the New Testament our Lord's parables of the Ten Virgins and the Prodigal Son, and of the Epistles the 8th of Romans ("No condemnation"), the 13th of 1 Corinthians ("Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels"), and the 15th ("Now is Christ risen from the dead"). Such passages we have read, and heard read, so frequently that it would be impossible to blot them out from the page of memory. It needs no resolve to say, I will never forget them.

That, however, is not the kind of memory referred to in our text. It is what I have called *moral memory*, the memory that has for its ally the conscience. We have an example of the failure of this moral memory in the case of Peter when he denied his Master. In the hour of repentance it is said he remembered the word that Jesus had said to him. He fell by forgetting; when conscience awoke, memory began to be busy.

It is this moral memory we have to keep in exercise. It is in the hour of temptation

that it needs to be put into use. Temptation is the test of remembered truth. Joseph, when suddenly tempted, recalled the truth concerning sin as evil in the sight of God. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

That was what the psalmist meant when he said, "I will never forget Thy precepts." It was not merely that through familiarity with the words in which these precepts are expressed he could retain them in his mind. That would be no great attainment. It was a natural process he could hardly escape. The important thing is to apply the precept at the moment when needed. Is our moral nature in that state of activity that memory at once brings before us the particular truth that may be opposed to the sin into which we are tempted to fall? At such times do we remember what Jesus has said to us?

It would be well to renew the resolution each morning. Not a day comes without some temptation or other. One day we are tempted to pride, another to covetousness, another to evil-speaking, another to dislike of some neighbour. Every day we are tempted to be unbelieving, or prayerless, or worldly-minded. We have to think not

only of what we are, but of what we are not, not only of what we do, but of what we omit to do. Ah! it is with no light heart, no easy disposition of soul, that we can really say, "I will never forget Thy precepts." It implies a fixed attitude of mind that can only be gained by continued dependence on a strength higher than our own. The more we resolve, the more shall we realise our need of the grace of God.

Evidently this thought was present to the psalmist's mind. The resolution he made did not come without the quickening of a divine power. He acknowledges this in the words that follow, "For with them Thou hast quickened me."

We have all had the experience of being quickened through intercourse with our fellow-men. We have also felt it by the perusal of books that have interested us. What is it to be quickened? It is to be made more alive. How lifeless should we be if we had no one to whom to speak, no one to speak to us! How difficult it would be to keep our thoughts from stagnating, or to throw energy into any pursuit! Books help to quicken us when they arouse our faculties to fresh exercise. We indeed get

no good from a book that does not in some way give us the feeling of being more alive. The fault may be in the author, or it may be in ourselves. If the book is poor in thought and commonplace in expression, it takes no hold of us; we read it listlessly and without profit. Or we may have in our hands a work of real power; but, failing to read it with the attention it demands, it exerts no influence upon us; we remain what we were, our imagination or our reflective faculties none the better.

It was not so that the psalmist had responded to God's word. He felt that what God said had brought him into a region of life. His soul became alive to the great things revealed to him. His conscience, his affections, his will were called into activity.

"*Thou* hast quickened me," he says. He recognises in God the Grand Source of spiritual life. He sees that the true life is impossible apart from Him who alone can impart it. He is also impressed with the fact that that life has come to him through means of "the precepts." It is through what God says that he has gained the experience of being alive. Otherwise

the life would have no intelligent meaning; it would be no higher than the life of sensation.

It is the life of the soul he is thinking of. The soul lives by thought, by desire, by love, by active endeavour. When we are quickened, we get spiritual thought and purpose. Our souls go out to the things that belong to the spiritual world. Through what God says we obtain a knowledge of these things. "For with them Thou hast quickened me."

The idea is presented in a remarkable utterance of our Lord recorded in St. John's Gospel: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Jesus had been discoursing on Himself as the bread of life. He had been telling His hearers that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. His words were misunderstood, and He went on to tell them that they had a deep spiritual meaning. They could not be understood by applying to them a material significance. "It is the spirit that quickeneth." It is no use to look at the words through the eyes of the flesh; they are spirit and they are life. Apply

them to the need of the soul; interpret them as intended to meet a spiritual experience, and we shall find in them spirit and life. They will carry us into a region where the soul is brought into communion with the Living One. They will draw forth our desires and affections, and then we shall be able to say with truth, "I will never forget them."

No; we do not forget what has been associated with a living experience. We forget many places we have seen, but we do not forget the places where we have lived intensely, where we have gone through a great joy or a great sorrow; we do not forget where we spent the happy years of our childhood. We may forget many people with whom we have had only casual acquaintance, but we do not forget those who have shared our life, who have wept with us when we wept, who have rejoiced with us when we were glad. We forget many of the books we have read, but we do not forget the books that first stirred our imagination or that opened to us regions of intellectual pursuit.

No; all these places and people and books are unforgettable. Can we say that God has

spoken to us what we can never forget? Are there truths of the gospel concerning which we say, "I will never forget them"? Are these treasured in our hearts as a possession for ever? Do we live by them, and do we hope to die in peace by them?

Never forget, never forget! Oh, it is a blessed attitude of mind! It gives the assurance of being never forgotten. It enables us to say, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: oh, visit me with Thy salvation."

At Christmastide what numberless tokens of remembrance are passing from friends to one another! The post offices of the world are crowded with letters and cards, all carrying the message. We remember you. It is a commendable custom, fitted to keep our affections in exercise. In the midst of it all let us take a little time to think of the Friend of our souls. He loves to be remembered. He appointed the ordinance of the Supper as a special opportunity for dwelling in loving thought on His Cross and Passion. Oh, remember Him! Do not grudge to set apart some hours of the week for meditation and prayer. Forget not your friends on earth, but,

oh, forget not your Friend in heaven! Think of Him, think of what He said, of what He did, and think of Him as now the glorified Christ ready to bestow upon us all the best and highest blessings. Let not this season pass without some fresh outburst of gratitude towards Him who is our All in all.

# THE MIND OF CHRIST.

"But we have the mind of Christ."—1 Cor. ii. 16.

Perhaps in reading these words the suspicion has crossed our minds that even St. Paul was hardly entitled to use such language. Is there not at least the appearance of presumption for any man to say, I have the mind of Christ? When, however, we examine the context of the passage, the suspicion may be dissipated. The apostle has been referring to the fact that spiritual things can only be spiritually apprehended. "The natural man," he says, "receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." On the other hand, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." In support of these statements the Old Testament scripture is quoted: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should

instruct Him?" If it were possible to instruct the Lord, then it would have to be said that the Lord has our mind. The apostle of course rejects the supposition as something like to blasphemy, and so he adds, "But we have the mind of Christ." It is not that the Lord has our mind; it is we who have His mind. So far, then, from being presumptuous, there is here a humble confession of inability to grasp the things of God apart from the mind of Christ.

In certain quarters it is asserted that the Church has received the doctrines of the faith, not from Christ, but from the Apostle Paul. Christian theology is said to be the fruit of Paul's thinking. But for the working of his subtle mind we should never have heard of what is implied in such expressions as grace, redemption, the atonement of the Cross, or the divinity of our Lord. One thing is certain: no one would have been so astonished at such an idea as Paul himself. All his writings are pervaded with the conviction which he expresses so strongly in his Epistle to the Galatians: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I

taught it; but it came to me through the revelation of Jesus Christ." "It came to me," he says. "Man did not teach it to me, nor did I invent it myself; I am indebted for it solely to the revelation of Jesus Christ." He who could speak thus might well say, "But we have the mind of Christ."

That is what we all ought to say. Concerning the things of God we have no mind of our own. Let not the thought hurt our pride. It is in accordance with much of our ordinary human knowledge. What are the subjects about which we are entitled to say that we have a mind of our own? Very few. Only those that at first hand, and in an independent manner, we have studied.

Take, for example, history. Most of us have read historical works; but how many have had the opportunity of searching the original sources of history? How many of us have examined the documents on which these historical works are founded? Are we acquainted with the State Papers treasured in Government offices, or have we explored the great libraries of Europe? When, then, we give an opinion on any historical matter, all we can say is that we

have the mind of certain well-known writers of history.

The same is true of science. We have read some scientific books; but few can claim to be independent students of science, working out its problems for ourselves, and capable of forming a judgment on its conclusions. If we have any opinion on such subjects, all we can say is that we have the mind of the men of science whom we have consulted. Strictly speaking, we have on these matters no mind of our own.

Now, as Christians, this is our attitude towards Christ. What by the effort of our own thought do we know of the things of God? We know nothing. We may form a thousand conjectures, but these can never satisfy us. For anything like real knowledge we are dependent on Christ's own utterances, and on what He has communicated through His inspired messengers. It is this which may give us some measure of repose in this restless age in which we live. We meet with all sorts of opinion on religious subjects. Our temptation is to have no settled beliefs. Many tell us that all hitherto held have been exploded. What

have they to offer instead? Nothing but the views which they have adopted from others or been led to form for themselves. Many of them are men of talent, some of them of genius; but we may be excused if we say to them, We prefer Christ to you all. His mind has far more weight with us than all your thinking. He imparts certainty, whilst your ideas at the best are but interesting or suggestive conjectures.

Yes, it is this note of certainty that is of such moment. What is it that produces certainty? It is knowledge of information transformed into knowledge of experience. When we read a book on science, our minds are informed. We believe the author to be trustworthy, and that he knows the subject on which he writes; but if we want to gain the certainty which he possesses, we must for ourselves go through the experiments of which he tells us. He tells us, for example, that water and air are not, as we might suppose, simple substances, that when analysed they are found to contain various elements. If we want to be absolutely certain of what he says we must see the analysis performed. Our knowledge of information then becomes a knowledge of ex-

perience. We obtain a knowledge that gives us a mind of our own.

Now, observe, this is what Christ does for us regarding the matters of highest thought. True, as we have said, we depend on His mind for information on revealed truth. No man apart from Christ can tell us whether or not salvation for our souls is possible. In the sense already explained we have to say that on this matter we have no mind of our own.

Revealed truth, however, is something much more than a system of doctrine. Its design is to give us an experience that will impart personal knowledge—that is to say, a knowledge not at second hand, but immediate. To have the mind of Christ is not only to think Christ's thoughts, but to live Christ's life.

Take, for example, the subject of prayer. Christ taught much about prayer. No one can have the mind of Christ without being informed that prayer is necessary to the soul's life. Christ lived the life of prayer. We cannot have His mind without being led in this, as in other things, to follow His example. He not only gives lessons about prayer, but by the influence of His life He

teaches us to pray. We go through the experience of prayer. Prayer becomes a real thing; it is no longer a mere theory. We actually pray, and we know that communion with God is a fact. Our information on prayer is transformed into the experience of prayer. We discover it to be a great reality. Christ's mind on prayer becomes our mind, and it may be said that we have now a mind of our own.

A similar line of remark might be pursued regarding other elements of the Christian life, such as the assurance of forgiveness, the consciousness of comfort in sorrow, the strength to overcome temptation, and a sure hope for the life to come. On these matters the mind of Christ gives us a mind of our own. Information on revealed truth is transformed into experience of what the truth can do for us.

How this is effected the apostle shows in the previous part of the chapter from which our text is taken. He uses a telling illustration. "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of the man that is in him?" Each man has his own thoughts which cannot be known directly by another. "Even so the things of God knoweth no

man, but the Spirit of God." It is the Spirit of God who enables him to know the things of God.

We may readily perceive the connection of this with the subject now before us. We cannot read the Gospel story, especially as given by St. John, without being impressed by the way in which our Lord spoke of the Holy Spirit. The subject, if we may so express it, was much on the mind of Christ. In His farewell discourse He told the disciples that the Spirit would come, as it were, to take His place. They were to depend on the Spirit for a deeper knowledge of what He had taught, and for further communications of truth.

We, indeed, make no claim to what is called inspiration, but we believe there is such a thing as having our minds enlightened by God's Spirit. God the Maker of our souls has access to our inward being more direct than what is possible to any fellow-creature.

The Spirit in some passages is called the Spirit of Christ. Christ said to His disciples, "If I depart, I will send Him unto you." It is by the Spirit of Christ that we possess the mind of Christ.

"The mind of Christ." Let us dwell further for a few moments on this remarkable expression which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. What sort of mind had Christ? Much could be said on this subject; but I will refer only to one characteristic feature—the spirituality of our Lord's mind. By a spiritual mind we mean a mind whose chief interest lies in the things that are unseen. You cannot read the Gospels without being impressed with the thought that our Lord's supreme interest was in the matters that concern the higher life of the soul. He spoke many memorable words on the value of the soul. He looked upon men as beings whose souls had an eternal destiny. He spoke of Himself as having come into the world to save souls. He offered Himself as able to give relief to souls burdened with sin. By His own example, as already indicated, He led men to a life of prayer and of habitual dependence on the care and love of God. He taught that the worth of the present life is to be estimated by its bearing on the life to come. He regarded this life as a trust for which we shall have to render an account. He represented it as having spiritual aims and as pointing to objects that

belong to the spiritual world. The things He most commended were those in harmony with such aims—purity, humility, meekness, forgiveness, and longing for righteousness. The things He condemned, and from which, if we may so express it, His mind revolted, were those most opposed to these aims—pride, self-righteousness, avarice, hypocrisy, insincerity, and vindictiveness.

To have the mind of Christ is to be in sympathy with this characteristic feature of His mind. We learn to look at everything from the spiritual point of view; we act on the principle that the spiritual is of infinitely more importance than the material. Let it not be supposed, however, that our Lord had no regard to the common things of everyday life. His parables abound with illustrations drawn from nature and from human intercourse. He admired the flowers of the field; the simplicity of childhood touched His heart. He looked with interest on the sower casting seed on the ground, on the fisherman dragging his nets to shore, on the careful housewife sweeping her rooms in search of lost money, on the young maidens going forth in procession to meet the bridegroom, on the guests at a wedding

feast, and on children playing in the market-place. These and many other sights had met His eye, and He found them full of suggestion. He knew that this is a world of toil, of tears, and of laughter; and from all He gathered lessons of spiritual instruction. The spirituality of His mind dominated all other interests. He considered the varied scenes and occupations of earth as pointing to one great end.

So shall it be with us if we have the mind of Christ. We shall not live in a world cut off from the engagements that belong to the sphere where God has placed us; but in nature around us and in intercourse with our fellow-men we shall discern what lies below the surface; we shall see the things that are unseen. We shall live with minds that spontaneously turn to God as the great Object of thought and of desire. So not presumptuously, but in all humility, we shall be able to say with the apostle, "But we have the mind of Christ."

# WALKING WORTHILY OF GOD.

"That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory."—1 THESS. ii. 12.

HOWEVER humble may be a man's calling in life, we feel that he is worthy of respect when he makes it his aim honestly to fulfil the duties appointed for him. It is the feeling touchingly expressed in Longfellow's poem, "The Village Blacksmith"—

> "Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
> Onward through life he goes;
> Each morning sees some task begun,
> Each evening sees it close;
> Something attempted, something done,
> Has earned a night's repose."

This is the thought in its deepest meaning which underlies the appeal of our text. There was nothing on which the apostle's heart was more set concerning his converts than to see them give a worthy representation of the Christian character. To him it

was a matter of supreme importance that the lives of those who professed to be Christians should bear witness to the transforming influence of Christian motives. He felt that all his efforts would be in vain unless the Churches he founded exhibited a kind of life that raised them above that of the world around them. He wanted the Christian cause to be upheld by men and women who so lived that none could mistake what they were. And undoubtedly in the early ages this more than all else helped the progress of the gospel. It was the lives of Christians that told the world what a new power had been introduced into human history.

It is what is needed in our own day. If we were all what we profess to be, more good would be done than what can be accomplished by books, preaching, or church organisation. It would be seen that the gospel possesses now, as of old, an irresistible force.

How tenderly, how lovingly the apostle reminds the Thessalonians of his anxiety concerning them: "As you know, how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, (as a father doth his children,)

. . . to the end" (to give the words of our text in the Revised Version)—"to the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory."

Let us think, in the first place, of this *divine call.* It is a continuous call. God is always calling us; He means us always to be listening to His call. The honest workman hears the voice of duty every day. He may be tempted to idleness or to slackness; but his conscience is awake, and he cannot refuse to listen to a voice that in his ears is louder than the voices around him. Other voices speak from without; this voice speaks from within. It is nearer to him than any other sound. We dare not disobey its commands. His trade is his calling, because, as he pursues it, he hears the call to diligence and to faithfulness.

So it is in the Christian calling. There are many calls around us. There is the call of ambition, the call of fame, the call of pleasure, the call of worldly compromise. How often we are tempted to listen to these and other voices! What shall render us deaf to these appeals? It is by listening to the *voice of God* in our souls. It is a voice more prevailing, because it speaks

to our hearts. It tells of a love that has sought and found us. We can say—

> "It is the voice of Jesus that I hear,
> His are the hands stretched out to draw me near,
> And His the blood that can for all atone,
> And set me faultless there before the throne."

It is not an occasional voice; it is continuous. It may be heard every day. It speaks to us at all times,—in our times of joy and in our times of sorrow, along the routine of daily existence, and in moments of high endeavour when some great undertaking is set before us.

Let us now think, in the second place, of *what it is to which God is calling us.* It is unto His own kingdom and glory. The idea of the kingdom is not so prominent in the Epistles as in the Gospels. We may find a reason for this in the fact that the people whom our Lord addressed had their minds full of longing for the restoration of that kingdom which had been taken from them by the Romans. In contrast to their desires Jesus set before them the kingdom of God, or, as He often called it, the kingdom of heaven. He wished to turn their thoughts to that higher spiritual kingdom which He had come into the world to establish.

The apostles, on the other hand, wrote to people who had no such earthly expectations. The people in Corinth, Ephesus, or Thessalonica were little troubled with agitations for a change of monarchy. They accepted as inevitable the rule of government under which they lived, and so the blessings of the gospel, as intended to form a divine kingdom, did not appeal to them in the same way. They understood better what the apostle meant when the Christian society was spoken of as the body of Christ or as the Church. Nevertheless, this idea of the kingdom was not lost sight of. Now and again Christian believers were reminded of the divine purpose to introduce men into a region of spiritual rule which could be referred to as the kingdom of God.

We have an example of this in the words of our text. The Thessalonians belonged to what had been the kingdom of Macedonia, associated with the names of Philip and of Alexander the Great. Perhaps some of them looked back with regret to other days, and wished that the Roman yoke had never been imposed upon them. If so, they might all the more welcome the assurance that God was calling them "unto

His own kingdom." They might rejoice in the thought that He was introducing them into a kingdom that was His own. They were called to recognise the King of kings as in a peculiar sense their King.

We in our day no longer connect the expression with political views. Whatever may be our nationality, or whatever may be our aspirations for the country to which we belong, we gladly accept the grand Bible idea that God has a kingdom of His own into which He calls us. We are not members of that kingdom by natural birth; we cannot claim its rights by virtue of our parentage. We are not forced into it; we are not compelled to fulfil its obligations. It is not extended by the power of the sword, nor does it issue laws binding its subjects whether they will or not. Its distinguishing feature is that it is the kingdom of love. In one passage St. Paul speaks of God having "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." The power of this kingdom lies in its appeal to the heart through the Cross of Jesus Christ. No one gains admittance into it but they who desire to be within it.

*God calls us.* Why does He call us if

He does not wish to have us? The call is prompted by love. And how can we answer the call unless it meets the longings of our hearts? What would be the meaning of responding to it if we did not wish to be subjects of the kingdom? To be driven into it would bring no joy. Oh, how inspiring is the thought, "Who calleth us into His own kingdom."

"His own kingdom *and glory*." Glory is a word of manifold applications. We speak of the glory of sun and stars, the glory of the blue sky and green earth, the glory of military display, the glory of fame, the glory of art, of music, of literature, and of all endeavours after the ideal. These in their own way are glorious things, and may stir feelings of exultation.

Yet it is of another glory that our text speaks. It is the glory of God. The glory of God is to be what He is, the eternal, self-existent Creator. We are little capable of setting before our minds a definite idea of what this means; and even if we were, it would not imply much spiritual knowledge.

Dr. Chalmers some time before his remarkable conversion had a period of exultation in the thought of God as the Creator,

and of the order of the universe. During many months he went about absorbed in such contemplations, and yet his heart was not humbled, nor did he attain abiding peace. When on a sick-bed the call came to him, it was far otherwise. He saw himself to be a sinner, and he found the way of acceptance through the merits of Jesus Christ, the one Saviour. He got another view of the glory of God. He saw God in His holiness, and he saw that man participates only in the divine glory by becoming assimilated to the divine character.

It is this which gives meaning to what otherwise is a vague phrase. The sun is a glorious object in itself; but for us its glory is that it communicates light and heat. God is glorious in Himself; but for us there would be no glory unless He could communicate His character of holiness. It is our capacity to become like Him that gives us any true idea of His glory.

It is the divine call which shows us this. As God calls us unto His own kingdom of love, so He calls us to His own glory of holiness. The call gives us new impressions of glory. We had thought of glory as consisting in some outward display, or

in making a name for ourselves that would attract the eye of men. Now we see that the true glory for man is to become like to God.

That is the main lesson we are to learn from the story of man's creation. The sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with its varied animal life, had been called into existence; they exhibited something of the glory of God's creative power, but they could not reflect the image of God. God designed to fashion on the earth a creature who could resemble Him in moral and spiritual excellence, and so we are told He created man in His own image, "in the image of God created He him."

To restore that image was *the grand purpose of redemption*, as St. Paul expresses it, "to be conformed to the image of God's Son." In another passage of his writings he enlarges on this glory that exalteth, and concludes in words of lofty significance, "But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Before this all other glory waxes pale. We cannot conceive a destiny grander than

to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

It is to this we are called. How in this world are we to act in accordance with such a calling? It is indicated in the opening words of our text—"That ye should walk worthily of God." We often use the expression, "a man of worth," and of some we say that they are worthy people. Such common modes of speech are a testimony to the conviction that, after all, it is character that is of most value. Here the idea is applied in a startling manner. To walk worthily of God! What does that mean? It means *so to walk that our course of life corresponds to God's call.* A man walks worthily in the world when he faithfully performs the duties of his calling. We as Christians walk worthily of God when we respond to His design in calling us. We learn to judge everything by the way in which God looks at it. Our temptation is to judge of everything by its appearance before men. We are inclined to regulate our conduct by a merely human standard. Our anxious question is, What will people think of this or that? We want to make sure that we shall do nothing to lessen the esteem in which

we are held by our neighbours. In its own place, of course, it is a consideration that must always have a certain weight. As members of society we have no right needlessly to shock the feelings of others. It is a Christian duty to take into account the sort of influence we are exerting on those around us. We have to think how they will regard what we say and what we do. When, however, that is our only or our main motive in life, it is a sure symptom that we know nothing of the divine call. A man who has responded to this call instinctively feels that the great end before him is to walk worthily of God.

"*Worthily of God.*" To take in the meaning of these words is to be at once delivered from a world of useless care. It is to have the mind occupied with aims that rise above worldly motive. It is indeed a high vocation, and no words can fully express all that it implies. Two things, however, may be said about it sufficiently clear. It fosters *lowly thoughts of self*, and it implants in the soul what Jesus so often recommends, *the grace of sincerity*.

And, oh, how blessed to be concerned chiefly not about what men think of us,

but about what God thinks. He never misjudges us; He never imputes to us motives that we abhor. He knows our temptations; He sees our secret longings after what is good. He estimates us, not so much by what we *are* as by what we are striving to *become*. He marks the ideal towards which our efforts are pointing.

A learner in the art of painting may produce sketches that are pronounced poor, but a master in the art may detect in them indications of genuine talent. At the best we are but learners in this art of responding to our high calling; but He who has called us knows what we are longing for, what we are praying for, what we are struggling for, and in His esteem these endeavours are not despised. He sees that we do wish to walk worthily of Him, and having called us to His own kingdom of love, and to His own glory of holiness, He will continue to encourage us by the promises of His Word and by the aids of His Spirit. The King will not allow any of His true subjects to miss the blessedness of that region of love and of holiness into which they have entered through faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners.

Are there any who have not as yet listened to this call? "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." It is the softened heart that listens. The heart is softened by a sense of sin and by longing after the things that God only can give. When the heart is thus softened, it is ready to listen to the small still voice that speaks in the soul. Man speaks from without; God speaks from within. Retire within yourself. Give God the opportunity of being heard. Do not allow the noises of the world to drown His voice.

"In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
That we love Him more than these."

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Memorials of the late Rev. P.W. Minto of Cannes / with biographical introduction by W.L. Watkinson. -- Edinburgh : W. Blackwood 1914.
xii, 255p. : port. ; 20cm.

Sermons.

1. Presbyterian Church--Sermons. 2. Mint Patrick Wood, 1840-1914. I. Watkinson, Wil Lonsdale, 1838-1925 , ed. II. Title.

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